

Christmas Number 1988

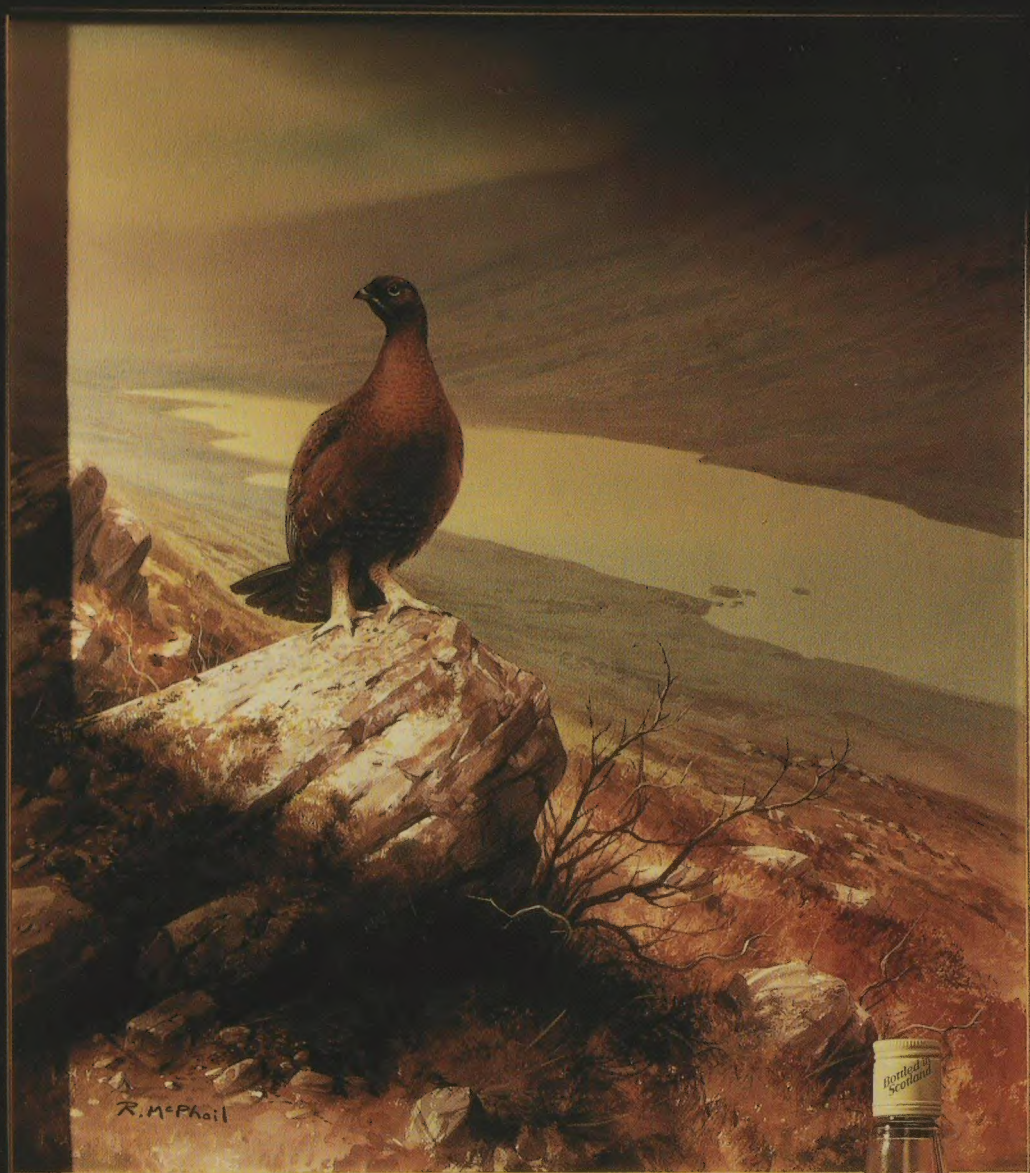


THE FRINGE AND BEYOND

Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett

Turkman warriors on horseback Diary of an anxious mariner

The ILN Christmas quiz: a real test of intelligence



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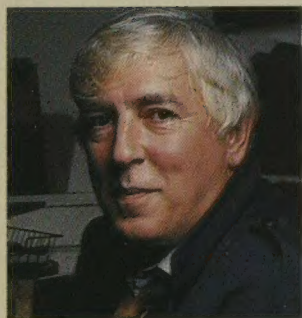
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Bound for Sydney: the *Amorina* with Marcus Mainwaring aboard

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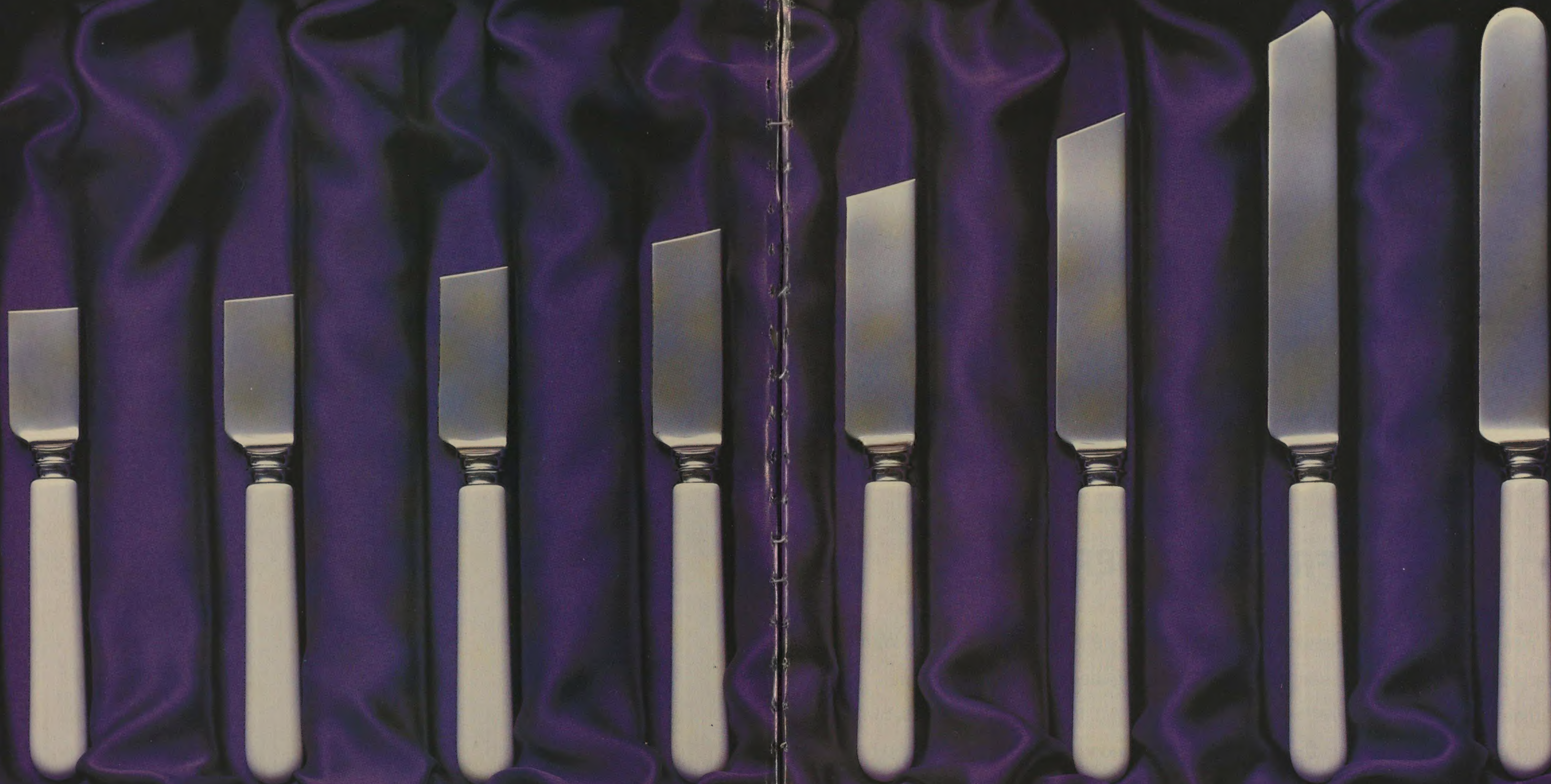
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ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA NORTON

CHRISTMAS

after Ogden Nash

JUST ROUND THE CORNER THEN ASK AGAIN or IT'S TOMORROW THAN YOU THINK

There is one time of the year when we should be looking at the world through
rose-tinted spectacles, but actually see it through a particularly
violent strabismus.
And that's Christmas
It's always the same old routine
From the worry that starts just after Guy Fawkes' Night and goes right through
to just-what-I-wanted, King's College and the Queen.
Far from attaining the spirit of that first birthday,
It's now a good-riddance-to-all-men and strife-on-earth day,
When previously mild-mannered senior citizens turn into Genghis Khans and Attilas;
And stores mark discontinued lines and shop-soiled articles as stocking fillers.
Whether you're shopping for a Harrods hamper or a pair of socks,
Wear a cricket-bocks.
Try not to notice that London is full of beautifully made-up women in fur coats
and hats, holding a few light, exquisitely-wrapped parcels and
looking not only calm but infinitely chic,
While you've got 62p left, your arms ache and your shoes lic.
It's terrifying to be caught up in this imbroglio
Unless you've just won *The Times* portfoglio;
And the general mayhem
Isn't helped by oleaginous, syncopated American chorales blasting out from every
overheated doorway with "Sahlent Nide", "Guard Wrist Ye Murray" and
"Oh Liddle Tayown of Bethlayhem".
But now there's just the last-minute things to get in
Such as sultanas, raisins, mistletoe, holly, the tree, cat-food, bulbs for the
fairy-lights remind me to check the voltage or wattage of whatever
pardon the pun, something for your brother-in-law, gin, double cream,
wrapping-paper, ham, the turkey, spare nappies well you know what
Des and Tricia are like, chocolates, wine, crackers, did we put down
gin, oh; potatoes, sprouts, tangerines, cranberry sauce no I'm not
it's cheaper to buy, stuffing, sausage-meat, mince-pies no I'm *not*,
stamps, Sellotape, gin, dustbin bags, gloves for Nan, bread, lemons,
tonic, oh and gin.
Christmas is a time when everyone gets dissipated
Slightly sooner than they had antissipated;
When those who look out of their windows to see only sodium lights, and video-shops,
launderettes and premises to let for business
Long for a bit more moon, snow, conifer and general Walt Disuniness;
When you spend £43.99 plus VAT
On an electronic marvel that ends up in the turkey fricassee;
When *he* invites all his cronies round on Christmas morning and discusses income/
expenditure sheets and ways of placating the Inland Revenue over
several large gins and tonic, of course,
While *she* is being heavily taxed at bread-source;
What started with a miracle
Is now empirical;
But every year the Christmas story
Is a priori.

By Nigel Forde

PRESENTS

for impossible people

Even those with the most gifted eye for other people's taste will have the odd relative or friend who wants for nothing. But do they? Inquire below for inspiration

Accordions of London

356A Kilburn High Road, NW6 (624 9001). Highly-rated specialist shop where second-hand Italian models begin at around £125.

Alan Alan's Magic Spot

88 Southampton Row, WC1 (242 2235). Long-established joke and magic shop with a huge array of every practical prank anybody with a mental age below 10 could want: whoopee cushions (65p), sneeze powder (45p), false hairy chests (£5.75) etc. Middle-aged Alan Alan serves customers with a giant safety-pin through his head.

Anything Left-Handed

65 Beak St, W1 (437 3910). All sorts of left-handed goods: most popular are the scissors, cork-screws, can-openers and pens equipped with left-handed nibs.

The Australian Gift Shop

Western Australia House, 113-115 Strand, WC2 (836 2292). One of the few places in London where you can pick up a jar of Vegemite. Immortalised in a number-one record not long ago, this delicious spread is the Australian version of Marmite (£2.75 a pound).



Sounds good: Accordions of London

The Cartoon Carpet Company

4 Short's Gardens, WC2 (240 5745). Have your favourite cartoon character woven into a rug or full-scale carpet: costs upwards of £1,000, depending on the complexity of the artwork. A series of ready-made carpets in stock, the most popular of which is a six-foot by nine-foot Disney Rug at £375.

Eaton's Shell Shop

16 Manette Street, W1 (437 9391). A stock of "about a million shells", each with complicated Latin names. From 5p to £500, depending on how much you want to shell out.

Garden Crafts

158 New King's Road, SW6 (736 1615). How about giving a gnome a home? Garden Crafts have a fine selection, beginning at £9. (Alternatively, for those who wish to give their neighbours an unmistakable message, a Mooning Gnome is available by mail order from Gibbs & Williams, Freepost, Park Grove, E15, for £6.50 plus £1 p&p.)

Get Stuffed!

105 Essex Road, N1 (226 1364). This gloriously-named outlet deals in all things stuffed. A budgie will cost you £30; a grizzly nearer £1,000. Not for the squeamish.

The Handweavers' Studio

29 Haroldstone Road, E17 (521 2281). Charming shop with a vast array of silk, linen, cotton and woollen yarns. For the would-be Gandhi in the family, a spinning-wheel (suitable for a beginner) costs £85. Fleeces begin at £7.

Jukebox Junction

90 Chalton Street, NW1 (388 1512). The owner Mike Flynn, has been here for 11 years and has about 60 machines on display at any one time. Prices for antique 50s models can be stratospheric, but you can pick up a modern version (with guarantee) for about £300.

The Kite Store

69 Neal Street, WC2 (836 1666). An extensive selection, ranging in price from 95p for a child's pocket-kite, to £265 for the Flexi-foil Hyper, which has a 16-foot wingspan and can be used for hang-gliding.

Robert Lee Bee Supplies

Willow Garden Nursery, Maidenhead Road, Windsor, Berks (0753



Kites of all shapes and colours on display

in The Kite Store, Covent Garden. One of those in stock has a 16-foot wingspan

830256). Give somebody a buzz with a Beginner's Apiary Kit, including hive, veil and gloves—costs around £100.

Liquid Gifts

8 Coronation Parade, Hamble, Hants (0703 452288). This is a wacky mail-order business from which a cheque for £8.99 will buy a bottle of Vampire Wine: "blood-red with a bite—comes complete with coffin." Sounds disgusting.

Mysteries

9-11 Monmouth Street, WC2 (240

3688). Terrific occult suppliers. A crystal ball makes an attractive present at £17. Or how about booking a tarot reading for somebody (performed on the premises) for £11.50 per half-hour? May not have much in common with the Yuletide Christian message, but a shop well worth checking out in any case. (You never know, you might be expected...)

Natural History Museum Gift Shop

Cromwell Road, SW7 (938 8753). A museum is not usually the place to

find presents, but the Natural History Museum has excelled itself with its series of six cuddly dinosaurs. Choose from a dimetrodon (pillar-box red), stegosaurus (mauve), triceratops (yellow), brontosaurus (red), tyrannosaurus rex (blue), or a rhanthoryncus (green). All available in two sizes: large (£25.50) and small (£12.95).

Preposterous Presents

262 Upper Street, N1 (226 4166). What about a Coughing Ashtray—a sick device to put smokers off



You either love it or hate it: the glass menagerie at Got Stuffed!, Islington



Swede and sour at the Swedish Shop

Regent Pet Stores

33-37 Parkway, NW1 (485 5163). If an animal is allowed by law, as a domestic pet then this shop will have one. A screeching trade in rare parrots. (Exotic pets should not be bought without specialist advice.)

Southern Engineering Co

80 Addiscombe Court Road, East Croydon, Surrey (656 2490). This company will dig a hole in your garden, insert a life-support system and call it a nuclear bunker. A bunker for five with six-week support works out at roughly £82,500. "Remember: No Shelter, No Survival!" says the cheerful sales pitch.

The Swedish Shop

7 Paddington St, W1 (486 7077). Bored with turkey? How about a smoked reindeer steak (£13 per pound)? Lots of other treats.

The Tandem Centre

281 Old Kent Road, SE1 (231 1641). Top-quality "Globetrotter" tandems from £660 to £900 ■

Compiled by Roger Sabin



Mike Flynn of Jukebox Junction, with some of his highly-prized models



Crystal balls and other instruments of the occult for sale at Mysteries



And Ginger



MICHELANGELO DURAZZO

LONDON PARIS NEW YORK

For city feasting on Christmas Day
Brian Mackay advises on the favourite haunts
of food fiends and the famous



DAVE HOGAN



Food and service at the Capital Hotel, left, are excellent, even if the boudoir décor is a taste too sweet. Les Ambassadeurs Restaurant in the Hotel Crillon (main picture) provides French perfection and dining among the rooftops of Paris. New York's Russian Tea Room, above, is favoured for its welcoming tonics of vodka and caviare

The idea of Christmas seen through a Hollywood filter with the extended family gathered round the fireplace, a sideboard heaving with roast turkey and wild boar, has for many of us become an impossibility. The high failure rate of modern marriages makes a family gathering likely to include more step-relatives than *Cinderella*. The work ethic takes hold too. Few of us have the time to shop for dried fruit, never mind engage in the long ritual of making plum pudding.

However, for even the hardest-nosed city-dweller, Christmas Day is different. It has been said that Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions and if there is one day when even the most puritan will cast caution to the wind and have a drop too much then it must be Christmas Day. It is even better to have someone else to make the bed, pour the wine and cook the turkey—but where can such luxury be found?

London is more likely to provide rain than snow on Christmas Day and assumes a strangely calm, almost inert, atmosphere. The main feasts will be taking place in the grand hotels where banqueting chefs will produce turkey and chipolatas, puddings and crackers.

You might, however, be in search of an exceptional meal and then the choice is The Capital Hotel in Basil Street. Philip Britten, the Michelin-starred chef who recently joined the hotel, mastered his skills under Anton Mosimann and Nico Ladenis.

Lunch will be served at around 1pm, beginning with a rich terrine of *foie gras* which you should wash down with a glass of Sauternes. The fish course might be fillets of sole in a light sauce, but there will be no turkey—only goose. Roast goose is either perfect or terrible; here it should be perfect, as should the potatoes cooked around the bird. With it you should look to the extensive list of burgundies: try the Corton-Grancey '78, probably the choice of Nigel Dempster, a regular at The Capital—perhaps there to keep a watchful eye on Lord and Lady Astor, Lord and Lady Grade or even Lady Vestey.

Christmas in Paris is a different affair altogether. As in August, the Parisians evacuate the city and many restaurateurs and chefs will take the opportunity to do the same. This should not present a problem to visitors who choose to stay at the Hotel Crillon. Its position in the Place de la Concorde gives it a significance in Paris life unmatched by any other major hotel. You can park your car within 50 yards of the hotel and a doorman will appear to carry your luggage. Breakfast will be served immaculately in your room which can be followed by a stroll along the Champs-Élysées where, for once, you can cross the Place de l'Etoile without fear of being run over.

When you return, the lunch guests will be gathering. The Taftt-inger champagne family who have recently spent millions on restoring the hotel will be represented—possibly by the head, Claude Taftt-inger, entertaining some of the powerbrokers of Paris. Pierre Cardin, who lives nearby, may be tempted to exchange one palace for another. Madonna is a regular visitor, so you may have to fight with Sean Penn for one of the two corner tables with a view across the Place de la Concorde. If, however, Arnold Schwarzenegger is there, it might be prudent to let him have first choice.

Foie gras will appear on the menu as is traditional at Christmas-time in France. Equally traditional are

oysters served with a squeeze of lemon. Other courses will offer a choice of classic French specialities such as *dinde aux marrons*—turkey with chestnuts—and *la bûche de Noël*—a rich chocolate-covered cake, shaped like a log. You should find a good range of clarets and burgundies here. An older Rhône like the Côte Rôtie is ideal for helping you to sleep through the afternoon.

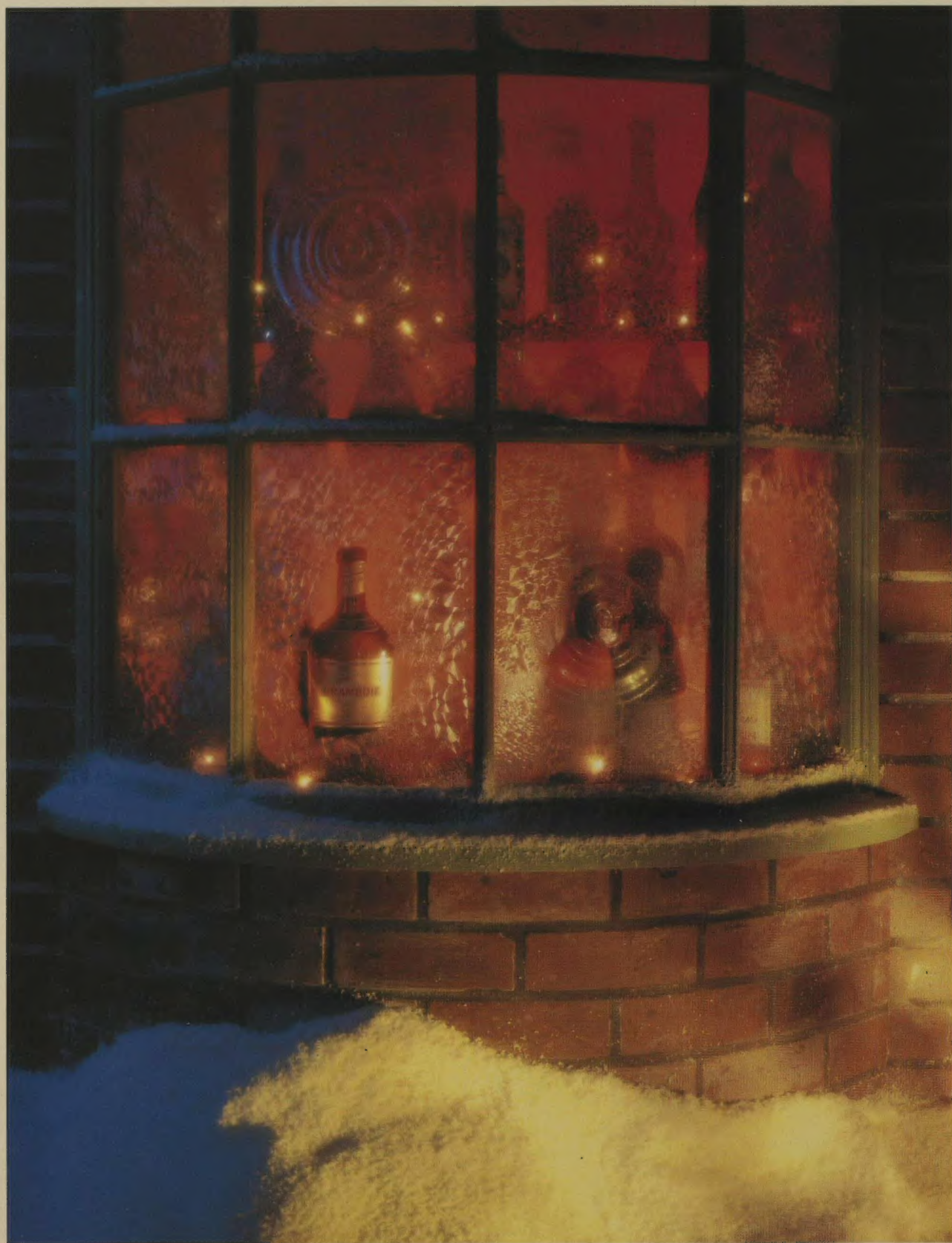
If you happen to be in New York it is worth remembering that while conventional restaurants—offering the fashionable hybrid American cuisine—will mostly be shut on Christmas Day, there is one place that will be open and is worth a lengthy visit.

The Russian Tea Room has a *fin de siècle* dining-room furnished in scarlet with gleaming glass, silver, starched white cloths, and a garnish of sparkling baubles, even when the temperature is 100°F outside. The waiters are of the old school, as vaguely mid-European as the menu, and appear to have been in service since the Revolution. Their skill in enclosing your caviare—beluga, sevruga—in perfect blinis with a dash of sour cream is legendary. Caviare is essential to match the occasion.

If Sylvester Stallone is at the next table you can be sure there will be three tables of bodyguards nearby. Jackie Onassis and Barbra Streisand are also known to pop in. You may even find the answer to the question "What does Woody Allen do on Christmas Day?"

The main courses are more comforting than extravagant. There will not be any turkey, but half a crispy roast duckling or some real shashlik (a sort of Russian kebab). The only problem you will face is whether to have champagne or vodka with the caviare but, whichever you choose, stick with it all the way through. The great advantage of Christmas Day in New York is that it will probably snow and there is nothing quite so comforting as sitting in the Russian Tea Room having the blood gradually warmed by vodka ■

The Capital Hotel, 22 Basil Street, London SW3. Tel: 01-589 5171. Hotel Crillon, 10 Place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris. Tel: (1) 42 65 24 24. Russian Tea Room, 150 West 57th Street, New York NY 10010. Tel: (212) 265 0947.



This Christmas give the most acceptable liqueur in the world.



THE PIE-EYED PIPER

Whatever the festival, wherever in Italy, the bagpiper would be there, his rude instrument droning in the streets. For Robert Fox there was no escape

The mist came down as fast as the light was fading. Ahead lay a little village cupped in the mountain road. It was Christmas Eve 12 years ago and all afternoon we had been exploring the tracks of the high plateau of the Abruzzo mountains, some two hours' drive from Rome.

The holiday had already begun; outside the taverns in the little settlements old men lurched into the road, huddled in enormous black shepherds' cloaks, fortified against the wind and the world by powerful local *amaretto* and *grappa*, pipes billowing smoke like bonfires, from tobacco with the consistency of a compost heap.

As the road curved I came across a shepherd, Giuseppe, hollering after three scraggy dogs and a small flock of sheep of indeterminate age and breed. I asked him about life and times in the Abruzzo mountains and his thoughts for the morrow, Christmas Day. "Life is tough," said the *montagnardo* with characteristic grumpiness. "I have just these sheep which I keep in that hut over there"—indicating a shack—"There's no price for lambs and I only make a bit of money in the spring if I can make *ricotta* cheese. Christmas? Tomorrow is a day like all the rest—I'll get up early to move the sheep down to the stream for water and look for some food along the way."

Not all those I met on the road were as infected with the spirit of Christmas non-existent as this rustic Scrooge. The Abruzzo region is still one of the poorest in Italy and a large number of its sons and daughters have to migrate to seek work, despite generous subsidy for public works over the years. They make one of the largest contributions to the three main police forces—a sure sign of rural impoverishment in Italy. At



One of nature's noble marginals, a bagpiper from the Abruzzo region of Italy

Christmas the families reunite and Abruzzesi return to their villages.

I had been in the region for only a week, on assignment from the Milan paper that had signed me up for the winter from the BBC but, with characteristic hospitality, my recent acquaintances insisted I

called in to welcome sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins.

In preparation for the prodigals' return, a special market was held in the main squares of the regional capital L'Aquila. Stalls were spread with charcuterie from wild boar (*cinghiale*)—strings of sausages

and offal, very much local specialities—and pyramids of nuts, all festooned with sprigs of wild greenery. Piercing through the din burst the squeak and groan of bagpipes, the colour of their master's face owing as much to *amaretto* and *grappa* as to musical effort.

I am sure this figure haunts me. I have come across this familiar performance year after year in the cities of Italy towards Christmas—in the cathedral square at Ferrara, and the fair along the narrow streets in Milan held on the feast of St Ambrose, the patron of choral music and teacher of St Augustine. The musician follows me, hunched over his instrument—his accompaniment banging a drum as arrhythmically as Dave Brubeck, and shouting for coins. Time and distance make me think that it cannot always be the same piper—one of nature's noble marginals—but my imagination says he is.

*Piercing
through the din
burst the squeak
of bagpipes*

In the market-place of L'Aquila I was seeing the last remnants of a way of life that had sustained the Abruzzo mountain people for centuries. L'Aquila was built as a northern stronghold by the Emperor Frederick II, the "wonder of the world", a genius at falconry, theoretician of statecraft and the only Holy Roman Emperor alleged by his foes to have been converted to Islam. The imperial plan was commercial as much as strategic and within a century L'Aquila had a population of more than 60,000. It became a centre of



The Abruzzo, still one of the poorest areas of Italy; its children have been forced to migrate to find work, but they always return home for Christmas

pastoral farming, where hay, victuals and, above all, mutton and wool provided taxes for the royal exchequer and supplies for the imperial armies as they marched to put down rebellion in northern Italian cities. In summer the flocks grazed in the highlands and were then driven south to winter in the warmer climes of the Plain of Foggia—a tradition which continues on a small scale, though now the sheep are conveyed by lorry.

Fifty years ago the autumn sheep fairs on the imperial plain, Campo Imperatore, were among the largest in southern Europe, with up to a million sheep bought and sold there before being transported to Apulia. In the Second World War the retreating German armies plundered the shepherds for meat, and the flocks were wiped out.

The region has managed to keep some of its wild and woolly character, and has something of *Peter and the Wolf* about it. At Christmas journalists in Rome and Milan would be told that the winter snows had driven the wolves down to the villages in the Abruzzo, where no item of meat, dead or alive, would be safe. The mountains are one of the last strongholds in Italy of wolves, lynx and eagles, and they even possess their own honey-coloured bear; but most of the species are now confined to barracks in the zoo attached to the Abruzzo National Park. Here, the

eagles in particular are protected from hunters who have bagged many in the past, to stuff and show off.

After dark we descended from L'Aquila to Rome by the fast motor route—by the mid 70s the political godfathers in Rome had endowed the Abruzzo with more kilometres of motorway per head of population than any other region in the Common Market. In Rome a group of journalist friends had gathered for an exiles' Christmas feast, beautifully prepared by our German hostess. Dutch, German, English, Australian, Italian gathered round the board, which was decorated with small Christmas trees, a habit just then catching on in Italy.

The morning would mean work for most of us, rising early to get a text of the Pope's sermon which we would wire or broadcast round the world. So that evening we set out on foot to witness Rome's midnight celebrations. The streets and piazzas thronged with Romans on the same enterprise. Doors of churches were flung open to allow congregations to come and go as cardinals, bishops and priests in gaudy crimson vestments celebrated the Christmas Eucharist. Ascending the long stairs to the Campidoglio—Michelangelo's masterpiece of planning by the old Forum—we passed by the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, where the glitter of chasubles, stoles, mitres and furnishings proved too

strong for the more protestant sensibilities of the company. On the steps was a piper from the Abruzzo, a predictable, monotonous refrain pouring from his rude instrument—all drone and no chant.

*The region
has managed to
keep some of
its wild and
woolly character
... the mountains
are one of
the last strong-
holds of lynx
and eagles*

In Italy celebrations of saints range from the superficial and theatrical, with processions and almost obligatory firework displays, to the profundity of rituals more ancient than Christianity. Twenty years ago at the mass for Santa Rosalia, the congregation grid-locked in the nave of Palermo Cathedral as they fell upon the old cardinal, being borne by six priests, to kiss his epis-

copal ring. In Naples thousands turn out for the miracle of the congealed blood of the saint made liquid on the feast of San Gennaro. The liveliest feast in Naples is that of New Year, when the inhabitants of the old city throw out the old before bringing in the new.

The feast with which we saw 1976 out in Italy combined the same mysterious elements of the Christian and pagan. We had been invited to the hill town of Cortona on the border of Tuscany and Umbria. A delicious supper had been prepared of lentils with a rich stew containing pigs' trotters. We had decided to combine the celebration of New Year with that of Epiphany, the arrival of the Magi with gifts, and this gave rise to a ritual whose symbolism must have owed something to the pagan world of the Mediterranean. By each place-setting was a wooden model of an animal connected with the wise men's journey, each reflecting the character of the recipient. Each beast signified the journey of the year just gone and was an admonition for the one to come. My beast was a donkey. However much the personal slur may still rankle, the creature of sticks and cotton gave remarkable presage of the load of my times in Italy—friends lost in the onslaught of the Red Brigade and Mafia, assassinations, an earthquake and a year of three popes ■



THERE ARE
MALT
WHISKIES.
AND THEN
THERE'S
LAPHROAIG.



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rich smokey taste of Laphroaig.



AS THE MEAL ENDED.



THE EVENING BEGAN.



Loneliest man in the world

Frank Dickens's cartoon strip Bristow appears daily in the Evening Standard and is syndicated to more than a hundred newspapers worldwide. Unlike his browbeaten hero, Dickens himself has never worked in an office but works at home, venturing out for an occasional drink or three

Christmas is a bad time for Frank Dickens. Or so he says. It is hard to be sure because the creator of Bristow and various other cartoon characters seems, at some point in his life, to have invented himself as well and the result is not renowned for consistency.

Convivial drinking is what Frank Dickens is renowned for. When convivially drunk, he embarks upon epic anecdotes which always feature gorgeous girls and legless media types and usually include at least one incident in which the narrator found it necessary to take off all his clothes. In this rich mix, veracity makes only rare appearances, so there seems every chance that, at any moment, it will be revealed that Christmas is a good time for Frank Dickens.

There are difficulties involved in keeping him to the point as well. Did I know that he used to be one half of a comedy act—Dickens and Mandel? That *Bristow* The Musical will soon be upon us? That VAT inspectors have no sense of humour? Well, yes, I did know that.

"The trouble," he confides, abruptly returning to the original subject, "is that in the weeks before Christmas it's parties, parties, parties. Then all my friends seem to go away. But by then I'm so drunk I can't go anywhere, so it's usually Christmas here."

"Here" is a 31st-floor apartment overlooking the City of London. It is impressively—one might almost say profoundly—untidy. One of Dickens's favourite stories is of the time he regained consciousness on the floor under the vague impression that some of his belongings had been stolen. "Actually, now I think I gave the stuff away, but I called the police as soon as I woke up. When they arrived the first thing they said was 'What a mess they've made of this

place...'" I know this is one of his favourite stories because he has now told it to me twice. His regular drinking cronies are subject to a higher repetition rate and, at times, it can move them to uncharitable responses. Fellow cartoonist Michael Heath says, "Frank has this one he keeps telling where he gets tired of his clothes and throws them out of his window on the 31st floor. Next morning the concierge has collected them, ironed them and left them in a neat pile for him to collect. My version is that he leaves his clothes, throws *himself* out of the window, and awaits a passing surgeon who will put him back together again..."

Dickens now claims that he is on the wagon. He is on the wagon because, just last week he fell off the balcony—not his own balcony, as in Heath's fantasy, but someone else's. Dickens is not insensitive to these little clues that he may be taking the odd glass too many so now, after a week in hospital, he has decided not to drink until Christmas. Well, until the final run-up to Christmas anyway. Apparently this is a decision involving some degree of professional sacrifice.

"People ask me why I mix with all these drunkards," he explains. "The trouble is it's a lonely business sitting at home and drawing. I have to pull in as much as I put out, so I need to mix with people in bars." So does Bristow drink then? "No, he doesn't. He might have a lager at Christmas, but he has a very low threshold. He would behave very badly."

This seems a good moment to inquire whether Dickens, the self-styled rake, and Bristow, the downtrodden clerk, have anything in common. "Oh, no. People think I'm Bristow, but I'm not. There was a Bristow fan club once, you know. A coachload of people came down



from Newcastle to spend an afternoon with me. They were the most boring crowd I've ever known. They were all like Bristow. We went to Le Bistongo and I took my clothes off and danced on the table. They all walked out. The fan club was disbanded the following week."

Dickens is now 53, divorced with one daughter. If he knows how much he earns, he is not letting on, but the immense popularity of his strips, not to mention the numerous advertising spin-offs, mean that he is now well-heeled. There were rumours of a big pools win, too, but details of this have slipped into the shadowy twilight zone where only drinking partners and accountants venture. Currently Dickens the cartoonist is preoccupied with *Bristow* The Musical.

The inflation of his two-dimensional character into an all-singing, all-dancing hero sounds fraught with danger, but the surviving half of Dickens and Mandel vouchsafes the kind of blind confidence which seems to exist only in the world of musical theatre ("I'm already working on the next show to put on after *Bristow* is an established success," he says, although not without trace of irony). With the man who wrote the James Bond theme supplying the music and the Watford Palace confirmed as an opening venue, Dickens feels that his second professional brush with the boards can result only in triumph. His first, with the late Stan Mandel, pre-dated any electronic retrieval system and can now be sampled only via Dickens's reminiscences.

"We started at Collins's Music Hall, then went to the Chelsea Palace, Finsbury Park Empire and eventually to the Windmill," he recalls. "I would go on and do 'There's a One-Eyed Yellow Idol to the North of Kathmandu' and then Stan would run on and say 'My name's Mandel and they call me Mr Showbusiness—once I missed a show and they gave me the business'."

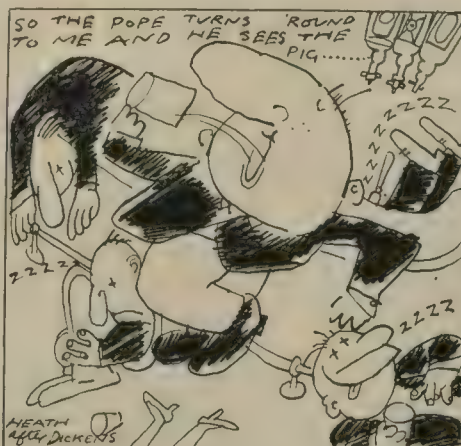
Sadly, the integrity of this artistic concept was soon compromised by Mandel's unbridled ambition. "Before long Stan started to tap-dance as he came on instead of running," Dickens says, shaking his head at the folly of it. This was the beginning of the end. When the theatre owner asked them to cut down the length of the act, Mandel—by this time an ego out of control—responded by doing *two* tap-dancing circuits, thus forcing Dickens to stretch his poetic delivery to the point of unintelligibility. It was curtains for the duo. Many years later Dickens discovered Mandel working in the classified department of the London *Evening Standard*—the paper in which *Bristow* appears every week-day. "So where do we go from here, Frank?" the former tap-dancer is reported to have inquired hopefully. "We don't go anywhere, Stan," came the reply.

Another Dickens creation, Albert Herbert Hawkins, *The Naughtiest Boy In The World*, is getting a higher profile these days. Dickens clearly identifies with this character (who looks remarkably like a miniature Bristow—"I belong to the can't draw school of cartoonists," admits his creator cheerfully) and is pleased to report that the strip's syndication is ever growing. "It

even started in Manila last week," he reports with some satisfaction. "Wherever that is."

Advertising work, children's books, the odd novel and his own eccentric brand of cycling occupy the rest of his life. Once he wanted to be a serious competitive cyclist and he still follows the big races. Today, however, his cycling activities depend upon owning many bikes which he uses in sequence, rediscovering them months later like mobile cairns marking the sites of forgotten drinking sessions from which he was unable to ride home.

His relationships with a famous fashion-designer and various "gorgeous girls" are best left unexplored; if you believe him, it is only a matter of time before a campaign map is pinned to the wall of Dickens's apartment, the better to marshal the comings (if this is the phrase I want) and goings of women for whom "a bachelor living in reasonable area, with decent income and sense of humour" represents irresistible temptation. However there is one steady woman in his life. Once a week for the past 26 years his



sister has driven over from Hertford at about 6am (when he starts work) to act as a professional sounding-board for his *Bristow* strip. "There is a danger that you can go over the top with a gag," he says guilelessly. "But if she laughs, it goes in."

People who do not laugh worry him, and VAT inspectors worry him most. "I said to this VAT inspector, 'Look, I've got to make people laugh and if you upset me, I won't be able to.' Do you know what she said? 'Your chosen profession is no concern of ours.'"

Frank Dickens is nothing if not good value. Even on the wagon he fires off self-deprecatory anecdotes at machine-gun speed. Like the time he had won the Bookjacket of the Year award and was feeling so pleased with himself, and not a little famous, that he went along to the Savoy for a celebratory drink. "There was this chap at the bar with three gorgeous girls. He smiled and beckoned me. I went over and said, 'What are we drinking then?' He looked puzzled and then said, 'you are the minicab driver, aren't you?'"

Then there was the time he was sitting alone in a bar in Spain. "I was reading a book called *Rudolf Hess, the Loneliest Man in the World*," he says. "In came this gorgeous girl with a man.

They sat in an alcove and I heard her saying 'He offered me a flat in town, a house in the country and a Mini if I'd sleep with him. Of course, I said no. He was so ugly—just like that man five tables down...'. I thought, never mind Rudolf Hess, I'm the loneliest man in the world."

The delivery of such stories makes you wonder what Dickens must sound like when he gets into top gear. If his stories are, shall we say, somewhat loosely bolted together, he is fanatical about incidental detail: thus the man in the Savoy wanted to go to Welwyn Garden City; the girl in the Spanish bar had the word Pontinental written across her no doubt gorgeous chest. To see someone so fastidiously preserving the trivia of a tale while its entire locale and dramatis personae gradually drift beyond his grasp, must be fascinating.

But how, in these atypically sober times, to sample one of Dickens's quintessential anecdotes of the sort that are primed with spirit, ignited by the proximity of gorgeous girls and fanned by the attention of fellow legless media men in what is left of Fleet Street?

Fortunately Michael Heath, creator of *Private Eye*'s "Great Bores of Today", is prepared to stand in while Dickens is incapacitated due to lack of drink. "It's hard to convey without doing the rolling eyes and all that," Heath warns, "but I can do you a typical Frank Dickens story. Though if you're expecting it to be in any way witty or amusing, you'd be very wrong. It's usually something like this:

"... look, I'd like you to meet this amazing, fantastic woman, we've been in bed for three days and I drank 14 bottles of champagne, anyway, we were in Australia yesterday and I got the wrong aeroplane—no, you have a drink, I've got one—and we got into this cab in Düsseldorf and there was a crocodile in it—I know, I've never seen one in a cab before either—and this girl I'm with takes all her clothes off, I don't know anything about her but it turns out her husband's driving the cab, yes, I know it sounds funny but we go to this hotel and the man behind the bar looks very familiar and you'll never believe this but do you know who it was? Hitler—never seen anything like it in my life, so I say to him I'll tell the manager who you are and he says no don't do that drinks are on the house... and so on and on and on."

Back on the 31st floor, sipping tea and surrounded by his famous characters, Dickens can afford to feel himself above all this. He wonders if he has told me about the time he thought he was robbed. Oh, yes, that's right. He imagines he is going to get a lot of work done—at least until the final run-up to Christmas. Until then, not drinking's all right. Christmas. That reminds him. "I thought up a good gag once—Father Christmas is saying to an accountant, 'Is a figment of your imagination tax-deductible?'" But where was he? Oh, yes, not drinking. "Not drinking is all right to start with," he can reveal. "But when you're with people who've had a few, well, to be honest, they gradually get a little bit boring. They repeat themselves, you see" ■



The Hon. Kieran Guinness pictured enjoying an examination of his healthy collection of Thomas Pink ties

Why I wear Thomas Pink shirts. Well-dressed man speaks out

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Thomas Pink cannot be the only people who use two-fold poplin?

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THOMAS PINK
SHIRTMAKER LONDON



LAST OF THE TURKMAN WARRIORS

The game of buzukashi is only for the brave. It demands skill and immense courage. So fearless are the tribesmen of northern Afghanistan that in the other "game" of war they have tried to defend themselves against Russian tanks in the way they know best of all—on horseback.

Photographs: Roland & Sabrina Michaud. Text: Jonathan Lee



The chopendox (riders) lean far out of their saddles to snatch the goat carcass which must be deposited in the scoring circle. Cash prizes increase with each game until the final battle



He must enter
the field, roaring
like a tiger . . .
He must stand firm
like a rock. And
charge and
destroy the enemy



Out of the dust-drenched tangle of sweating men and foaming horses, a lone figure breaks free. Leaning at an improbable angle far out of the saddle, he gallops away from the mêlée. As he gains speed, the rider drags the mangled remains of a decapitated goat across his horse. Others, seeing the breakaway rider, stream after him and, shoving and barging, try to dislodge his load. As the frantic struggle develops, horsemen charge into the rider at full gallop, or cut across his line of advance. Whips flying, their hands reach out to grab one of the dangling extremities of the dead animal. Sometimes two horsemen, each holding a different leg of the carcass, race side-by-side until one or other is forced to yield, or a limb is torn from a socket.

As the goat falls to the ground, or the rider is



Turkman and Uzbek tribes have traditionally played *buzkashi* over the vast plains of northern Afghanistan. Blood is frequently spilled. *Buzkashi* horses are prized for their agility; they will stand firm over the carcass of the goat while the rider tries to pick it up



The war has bitten deep . . . Children grow up not knowing what their homeland looks like. Among a people who have always depended on horses the new generation cannot ride

forced to a halt, more and more horsemen rush into the fray, scrumming around the mauled remains. Finally, a rider makes a break, reaches open space and stands alone and proud, or gains the scoring circle, drops the goat and is honoured as the winner.

Such was *buzkashi* when Roland and Sabrina Michaud travelled the northern plains of Afghanistan, before the 1979 Soviet invasion, capturing in photographs the ferocious national sport of the Turkman and Uzbek tribesmen. Now, while the peoples of Afghanistan are involved in a more deadly "great game", the Michauds' photographs are reminders of an endangered culture.

Buzkashi was born in the vast steppes of Central Asia and inner Mongolia. It is a war game, a practice for the real thing. The Turkmen and Uzbeks claim among their ancestors many of the great nomadic tribesmen who, over successive centuries, broke out of the steppe heartlands and, on horseback, carved vast empires. Makhtum Quli, the Turkman national

poet, wrote about the priorities of his culture: *A distinguished, brave youth, First must have a fast horse.*

and *A young man has three wishes in the world; A lover, a weapon, and a good horse.*

The first *buzkashi* games used the corpse of a decapitated enemy, probably captured in a raid on the settled lands of Persia or the Oxus basin. Today a calf or goat is used. Not that this makes the play any easier, as the carcass often weighs as much as 70 pounds. The game starts when the carcass is dropped in the middle of the field (*maidan*) and the riders (*chopendoz*) race to reach it. After a bad day in the *maidan* a *chopendoz* may explain his poor form by claiming that the calf was more like a grown bull, just as cricketers blame the pitch or the ball.

Buzkashi horses are the finest of the local breeds. Marco Polo, writing of this area in the 13th century, observed: "The horses bred here are all of a superior quality, and have great speed. . . The natives are in the practice of gallop-



Life in the steppes before the war. In a yurt—nomadic tent—a would-be *chopendoz* takes tea. An elder, highly-skilled *chopendoz*, left, relaxes between games of *buzkashi*. Leading *chopendoz* will wait for stakes to increase before joining in. No horseman is equipped without his whip, which is used mercilessly, and a pair of thick leather boots. In peacetime this boot-seller would have been much in demand



ing them on declivities where other cattle could not, or would not, venture to run. They assert that, not long since, there were still found in this province, horses of the breed of Alexander's celebrated Bucephalus. The whole of the breed was in the possession of one of the king's uncles who, upon his refusal to yield them to his nephew, was put to death; whereupon his widow, exasperated at the murder, caused them all to be destroyed. . ."

The tradition of breeding high-quality horses continues and, though one famous breed may

have been destroyed, the *buzkashi* horse is as valued in Afghanistan as any thoroughbred is in Europe. Small and wiry, they are capable of both speed and endurance. Indeed, the Turkmen claim the legendary Darley Arabian horse, forefather of the English thoroughbred, was an Akhal-Teke horse from what is now Soviet Turkmenistan. From the same Central Asian stock came the horse who sired the German Trakehner, the Hungarian Nonius, and other famous European lines of bloodstock. It was the search for similar horses for the East India Company's cavalry stud that took William Moorcroft to Bukhara in 1825—the first European to visit the city for several hundred years. Fittingly, Moorcroft never returned to India but died in Andkhui in northern Afghanistan, the heartland of the *buzkashi* horse.

Top-rate *buzkashi* horses are also prized for their agility and intelligence. They will stand firm over the carcass of the goat, often holding it with a hoof to prevent others from stealing it. Once the *chopendoz* has hold, the horse will force its way through the tangle of players and run instinctively for the winning circle. To own a pedigree *buzkashi* horse costs a fortune in local terms. Not only do the animals command high prices, they also need a groom. However, to own such a horse is one of the most prestigious status symbols in northern Afghanistan.

Until the 70s, *buzkashi* games were always important social events, often held to celebrate religious or family occasions. Each tournament would be sponsored by one, or possibly two, men who would risk their reputations in the process. If the event was successful they would be the talk of the tea-houses. Disorganisation or failure to observe protocols meant more than loss of face. It could lead to a violent revival of old ethnic rivalries which had been passed over in the interests of the *buzkashi* festival. Powerful leaders (*khans* or *bais*) could dampen the event by leaving early. Once this happened the game would collapse prematurely. The sponsor would then suffer enormous loss of prestige.

When European tourists watched the sanitised, government-sponsored annual championships in Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, they often complained of boredom as the games got bogged down in perpetual scrums. In the north, however, the game was played differently. Free from the concrete restraints of Kabul's modern sports stadium, the riders were able to gallop widely over the plains. The onlookers, all partisans of one particular *bai* or *khan* and his *chopendoz*, formed an excited all-male crowd. Poor or foul play would bring pointed remarks while a particularly spectacular display of horsemanship would bring praise from all but the rider's sworn enemies.

Crowds expected their share of the action. The retinue of the *khans* and *bais* used to ride on the fringes of the action, providing advice, new horses and sometimes first aid for their *chopendoz*. Others would squat on rising ground around the *maidan*. No *buzkashi* game was worthwhile unless at some point the horses had run into the crowd,

scattering them. Such occasions gave the onlookers a chance to show their own courage. The bravest (or most foolhardy) stayed seated until they were almost under the horses' hooves.

At the beginning of a tournament, after the goat or calf has been ritually slain, the prizes are small. Only when the stakes are raised will the top *chopendoz* try their hands. The last event of the tournament, which can go on for up to three days, is the grand finale and the prize is the largest of all. Then there is little mercy as Afghanistan's most skilful horsemen fight for the final honour. It is not that the cash prize is great, but the reputation acquired by winning against such hard fought competition is a matter of honour and social esteem.

Buzkashi is not a game for faint-hearts. Bones are frequently broken and blood spilled. Makhtum Quli's exhortation to Turkman warriors could serve equally as advice to aspiring *chopendoz*:



Traditional head-dress for a married woman

*He must enter the field, roaring like a tiger,
He must be cunning, like the fox,
He must stand firm, like a rock,
And charge and destroy the enemy.*

The heroes of the game are legion, and tales of famous horses, riders and events can still be heard in the cramped, unsanitary refugee tents of Pakistan's frontier provinces. There is the story of the *chopendoz* who tore out his stomach while reaching for the goat and, having grasped the carcass, continued until he had won, only to be carried away to die. There was the famous old man who played the game well into his 80s and was still a match for the best.

Buzkashi also has its lighter moments. In the middle of the fiercely-contested game, there is

the *jurchi*, or announcer. He is there to proclaim the names of winners and the horses' owners, to adjudicate in disputes and distribute the prize money. But his chief role is that of the joker. One well-known buffoon, now a refugee in Pakistan, wore a wild black wig which made him look like Dennis the Menace. Mocking a rider's style, or a well-known personality's walk or speech, he was as much an attraction as the *chopendoz* themselves. He was far from a fool, though, since his routine would sometimes include falling from his saddle and being dragged by one foot at full gallop. Then, suddenly, he would be back in the saddle and the crowd would cheer wildly. By taking the role of a clown, the *jurchi* could defuse potentially dangerous confrontations between rival clans by his performance and thereby ensure the success of the games.

Today, though, real *buzkashi* is no longer accessible to Europeans. In some of the refugee camps of Pakistan, Turkmen and Uzbeks try to retain their ancient tradition, but the playing areas are so small they cannot reach a decent gallop, and the ground is so uneven that horses can be badly hurt. Many of the famous riders are dead and the best horses are either still inside Afghanistan or have been destroyed in the war.

Over the past 10 years, a new generation of heroes has arisen from among the *chopendoz*: those who fight Russian tanks from horseback, or individuals like the *chopendoz* who died rescuing a wounded kinsman from under the barrels of a helicopter gunship. The war in Afghanistan has claimed nearly nine per cent of the country's population. In the north, the casualties are reckoned even higher. Places that were famous for their *buzkashi*, such as Kunduz, Andkhui and Mazar-i-Sharif, have been devastated by war; many of the men that the Michauds photographed have been killed or are so maimed they will never ride again.

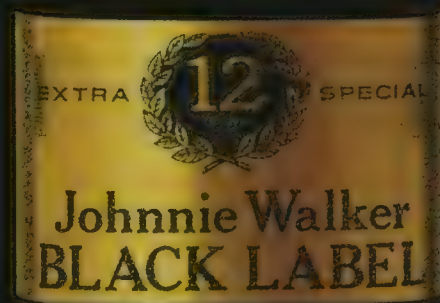
A talk with those who have survived in cramped refugee towns is tinged with sadness as they mourn a lost generation. The war has bitten deep into the proud cultural traditions of these people. Children grow up not knowing what their homeland looks like. Among a people who have always depended on horses, there is a new generation who simply cannot ride. As old men have died or been killed, so, too, the great oral traditions have gone with them: folklore, unwritten histories and the names of heroes. As another Turkman poet wrote:

*Flattened are those prosperous lands,
The nightingale's songs are no more,
The hyacinth wilts, the roses wither,
People hang their hair in grief.*

*Karacaoğlu seeks no fun nor feast,
I have not galloped on an Arab horse,
I've made my love sulk, and not laugh,
And so the pained heart throbs in grief.*

Roland and Sabrina Michaud's book *The Horsemen of Afghanistan* is published by Thames & Hudson on November 21, £36.

Make the ultimate sacrifice. Give one to someone else.



THE FRINGE AND BEYOND



In 1960 Beyond The Fringe introduced to dormant Britain the satirical talents of Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller and Alan Bennett. The revue's success changed the nature of British comedy and launched each of them upon prominent careers. But they have seldom met together since. Here the four discuss the many changes in their lives and fortunes

LORD GNOME GOES PUBLIC

Peter Cook by Michael Watts

Peter Cook arrived for lunch in a miasma of aftershave and cigarette smoke, looking suspiciously the worse for wear: the result, one inferred, of over-indulgence in the television Olympics. Something, anyway. Though scrupulously well-mannered, he frankly did not appear the "funniest man in the world", a title which Peter Ustinov, no doubt thankfully, once ceded to him. Then, somewhere around the multiple sambucas, the prim, authentic tone of E. L. Wisty suddenly emerged. "What a shame," he began, his eyes acquiring that fixed Wisty look, "about poor Charles Hawtrey. Did you know that, according to today's *Sun*, the "veteran star of the *Carry On* films"—and I quote—is faced with having both his legs amputated?"

Something to do with poor circulation, I foolishly supposed, slipping unconsciously into Pete 'n' Dud-speak.

"Oh no, not bloody likely! There's nothing wrong at all with *The Sun*'s circulation. A quite remarkably successful newspaper. Charles Hawtrey, however, is facing the choice of life and death, even as we speak. And by the way," he added, leaning into my tape recorder, "I hope your chuckles at his expense will be properly preserved when transcribing that tape."

"Rhapsodic cynicism, unmarred by gratuitous compassion" is how Barry Humphries, friend and contemporary, defines Peter Cook's humour: which is a graceful tribute to the wit who memorably savaged David Frost, incorrigible thief of bad gags, with the epithet "bubonic plagiarist". Cook is unusual in being both witty and funny. There was the time *Playboy* asked him to describe how he had lost his virginity at Radley public school. "At what end?" he shot back.

The young comic actor and writer, Stephen Fry, heir to the graduate comedy tradition Cook largely shaped, thinks that his greatness as a monologist, whether doing tramps or judges, comes from how "he just stares at you and repeats words, time and again". Ian Hislop, editor of *Private Eye*, argues that his humour works "by making surreal connections between things". But everyone who knows him well at least agrees that he can be funny about absolutely anything. Hislop recalls the famous dinner held in Brighton when he succeeded Richard Ingrams at the *Eye*: "Richard and I prepared short speeches. Cookie prepared nothing. He gave a speech on the sauté potatoes we'd just eaten. He spoke for about 15 minutes. Willie

Rushton sat in the front row crying with laughter, saying 'that is the funniest man there is'."

Cook clearly commands the respect of his fellow humourists. Yet they also admit that as a public performer he has never truly equalled the achievements of *Beyond The Fringe*, more than a quarter of a century ago. His great partnership with Dudley Moore, which succeeded famously in the television series *Not Only . . . But Also*, and infamously in the scatological dialogues of *Derek and Clive*, never bore fruit in the all-important, lucrative films. The best was *Bedazzled*, a swinging 60s Faust. The worst starred them as Holmes and Watson in a version of *Hound of the Baskervilles* directed by Andy Warhol's protégé, Paul Morrissey. A highlight of its bizarre humour was a scene in which a chihuahua urinates over Moore's face.

On his own, Cook did better in *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer* and the recent *Whoops Apocalypse*, but it is hard to credit that Stanley Donen, director of *Bedazzled*, proposed him as the next Cary Grant. He was taking an unduly rosy view of the slim Edwardian dandy Cook then presented to the world.

My lunch guest no longer has that aquiline profile. He will be 51 this November, and the

features have grown waxy, the appearance rather careless, with a pronounced pot filling out the tee-shirts he now invariably wears. There have been hard bouts with the bottle, and, some say, drugs. After two marriages and two daughters, he lives alone in Hampstead, though he has a girlfriend, a Chinese lady, nearby.

Professionally, his worse moment has probably been as co-host of the embarrassing *Joan Rivers Show*, where, given scant opportunity to speak, he merely bookended guests lined up on a sofa. The idea seemed to be to pitch his patrician Englishness against her brassy American. This was also tried, and largely failed, in a Hollywood television version of the British sitcom, *The Two of Us*, in which he played a butler. More recently, he has been a suave estate agent in an American commercial for Diet Coca Cola.

The desultory nature of these appearances makes one ask why his career has not gone better. It is a question echoed by mystified colleagues. David Renwick, the screenwriter responsible with Andrew Marshall for *Whoops Apocalypse*, cast him successfully as a demented Prime Minister, urging the unemployed to leap off Beachy Head. It is the kind of authority figure he has guyed since *The Fringe's* Harold Macmillan sketches. But Renwick had to overcome initial reservations: "Dudley Moore had become a big film star, and Peter hadn't, and we had to ask ourselves whether there was any reason for that. In the end, it was one of the more significant things he's done over the past few years. But he really hasn't done that much since his halcyon days, and there was a sense of him coming out of the wilderness."

Cook is basically a shy man, not much given to explaining himself. He characteristically deflects personal inquiry with jokes—"the classic way of jamming intimacy," Humphries reasons—or with long pauses in which yet another cigarette is lit and rather theatrically cocked. He allows that he is not "fond of work". He plays golf instead, and supports Tottenham Hotspur.

Some of his friends tend to apologise for this apparent indolence, and make him sound rather tortured. One of the oldest, Nick Luard, with whom he ran the Establishment club during the 60s satire boom, fancifully suggests that the absurdities which form his raw material somehow prevent him fully taking part in life. "I think he's highly eccentric; certainly something of a solitary man. In my experience, he's been at his funniest in private because the formal structure of public performance slightly inhibits his talent. I think Peter has never really found the vehicle for his astonishing gifts, even though he's incomparably more talented than any of the other three in *Beyond The Fringe*—much more so than Miller, and, in my view, Bennett—which is a pretty high standard."

But perhaps the truth is that Cook would rather watch television than appear on it. Apart from the Joan Rivers debacle, which he blames on shooting six programmes in six days, he remembers hosting his own disastrous chat



CLIVE ARROWSMITH

Cook in the Soho offices of *Private Eye*. The funniest man in the world and funniest in private

show in the 70s. It ran for only four programmes. "The first minute of the first show I realised that I was not going to be interested in anything the guests said."

What do interest him, omnivorously, are newspapers and their more colourful proprietors, like Robert Maxwell, from whom he tried to buy *The Sporting Life* in 1985. Maxwell, who won £250,000 in libel costs against *Private Eye*, is a particular *bête noire*.

According to Humphries, Cook could have been a senior journalist, capable of writing *Times* editorials. A few years ago, in fact, he had a *Daily Mail* column. What it strikingly revealed was that this emblem of 60s liberalism, whose comedy started as a reaction against the complacency of Conservative post-War Britain, now held unequivocally right-wing views. Luard, indeed, thinks he has grown more jaundiced with the 60s, especially its socialism, the further they have receded. But Cook insists that his politics always began on the right, "though it's true that I couldn't stand the crookedness of Wilson, and Callaghan was even worse". At the last election he voted Labour, but only because he hated his local Tory MP.

It is partly the close proximity to politics and

journalists, and the scope for making mischief, which have kept him at *Private Eye* since 1962, when he and Luard invested £1,500 in the fledgling magazine. He still goes into the Soho offices for the Thursday joke sessions. His recent contributions included skits on the Gibraltar SAS inquest, but his most durable concept has been the cover design, with its news photograph and jokey bubble.

Since he owns 75 per cent of the *Eye's* shares, Cook can justifiably claim to be Lord Gnome, its mythical proprietor. Unlike Lord Gnome, however, he is a remarkably benign owner. He swears that neither personal enmities nor friendships have ever influenced the editorial. The *Eye* pays no dividend, and, even if he tries to sell his shares in a magazine whose estimated annual turnover is now £6 million, he will not make a profit. A provision apparently inserted in the articles of association means that he must offer them first to other shareholders at cost—that is, for £1,500. But there is a *quid pro quo*. It is thought that the *Eye* secretly subsidises his lifestyle. Cook lives comfortably off the *Eye's* petty cash.

Hislop nonetheless suggests that he is so loyal because he sees *Private Eye* as the last remnant

of his satire movement, and this is entirely reasonable. Cook is an unselfish enthusiast of other people's work, and the Establishment notably launched the British careers of Lenny Bruce and Barry Humphries, and revived the ailing Frankie Howerd. This cuts no ice with the journalist Peter McKay, however. He says that the magazine is "just somewhere in Soho for Cook to arrive drunk in the afternoon and play at being a journalist."

McKay is one of several former contributors, including Auberon Waugh and Nigel Dempster, who opposed Ingram's promotion of Hislop. He claims that Cook would have joined them, too, "but he recognised that Ingrams had taken control of the magazine, and, if he ever wanted to walk over the doorstep again, he would really have to back him."

"Ingrams has set up the thing so he can virtually retire but stay on board. By putting in Hislop, the calculation was that it would make *Private Eye* safer and more profitable, and to an extent that is true. They're getting fewer libel actions than they used to, and paying out less. But it's also become very poor. I certainly don't get as many laughs out of it. It used to be that *Private Eye* was mentioned in the papers every other week." Cook naturally disagrees with all this. "I think it's as funny recently as it ever was."

If his relationship with *Private Eye* has endured surprisingly well, that with Dudley Moore, once his Sancho Panza, has come under frequent strain. Moore was undoubtedly patronised by his fellow satirists for being the least intellectual. Luard even now maintains that he was "Cook's creation".

Moore's eventual Hollywood stardom must have been infinitely gratifying. But it caused Cook terrible jealousy, despite his denials over the years. A *Daily Express* headline cruelly epitomised it: "The star who was left behind when little Dud grew up into a giant."

Cook has amply repaid the cruelty, however. Last August, in *Vanity Fair*'s sharp profile of his good friend and partner, he was quoted ridiculing Moore's vacuous Los Angeles lifestyle and his bossy young wife. "She has had a special boot made for his foot," he scoffed. "She marches him up and down the side of the Grand Canyon before breakfast."

The remarks were made, allegedly off the record, to an English writer, a woman who had known them both since *The Fringe*. Their repetition shocked Cook, and still does, though arguably more for what they reveal of himself. "She behaved shittily to me," he says, with heat. He recalled that she had switched off her tape recorder. "And I, being my normal bitchy self, spilled the beans about Dudley. I was just trying to make her laugh."

A long time ago, Cook observed that satirists are like spiders: "We are always devouring each other." His difficulty is that, unlike his former *Fringe* colleagues, he has never really ceased to be a satirist. They moved on. He remains, more or less, what he was in the dear, dead 60s ■

SAFE IN HIS SEASIDE WOMB

Dudley Moore by Sally Ogle Davis and Ivor Davis

He lives in a \$4 million fun house on a broad, sandy beach bordering the Pacific surf. He drives a cream and white Bentley. He's married to a striking woman 24 years his junior. How can this man be happy?

The politically correct answer on cuddly Dudley Moore is, of course, he can't. From the offices of Peter Cook's *Private Eye* or the front tables at Langan's, it amounts to holy writ—you lose 10 points of IQ for every year you spend among the space cadets of Southern California. Dudley's been here too long, goes the conventional wisdom. He's sold out, gone Hollywood, had his brains fried by the sun or vacuumed clean by the Santa Ana winds. He's been "corrupted" by his romances with Hollywood starlets, by his association with Blake Edwards, by affluence, by analysis, by exercise, by who knows what. We all know it's happened though. Well, don't we?

Twenty-five years on, Dudley has simply travelled too far beyond the fringe—beyond the worthy masochism of Thatcher's Britain or the only acceptable alternative—the misery of daily life in Manhattan, beyond the struggle that is somehow supposed to keep your grey matter grey and your articulation articulate. At 53, at least in Britain, he's become a Pavlovian response, invariably producing a mournful countenance, a slow shake of the head and a "poor Dudley".

Alan Bennett holed up in an execrable hotel on a wet weekend in Harrogate is somehow engaged in a noble pursuit. Dudley practising Bach preludes and fugues on a Venice beach is not. Of course he doesn't do anything to help his case. What serious man lives in a pink house with two personalised licence plates in the garage—"Tendrlly" on the Bentley, "Yoggies" for "Yo Doggies", a quaint old Southern expression denoting enthusiasm—on Brogan's (Mrs Moore's) BMW, rooms filled with dolls, high chairs, teddy bears and pictures of small people? There are two dogs, a Keeshond named Chelsea, a Samoyed called Minka, even a cat. There is a real child in residence, Brogan's son John who's 14, and another, Dudley's son Patrick, 12, visits. But on the whole it's a playhouse for adults, a house with no past, a sunlit house without shadows.

One doesn't just live in Southern California, however, one has a "life style", and Dudley's on the face of it is more stylish than most. It's underwritten of course by his career as a movie star, and it's precisely the idea that America should have taken up one quarter of the most acerbic, irreverent quartet ever to tread the British boards, and clasped him to its plasticised bosom,

that produces all those mournful sighs north of the Thames.

A recent story on Moore in the American magazine *Vanity Fair*, written by English writer Glenys Roberts, was more of the same—a portrait of the star as Peter Pan, living with Brogan, part nanny, part baby doll in their kiddie estate in "Munchkinland". On putting it down one wondered if they fell asleep every night in their fashionable log bed under a covering of leaves flown in by the birds from the tern sanctuary on the beach outside.

The piece left Dudley severely "pissed off" and not for the first time. "I'm getting fucking tired of it," he says, sitting in front of the fire in his cluttered living room, drinking espresso and munching on an "illegal" Kit Kat brought in by Tom the houseman. His normal diet follows the dictates of the late Nathan Pritikin, guru of low-fat, high-fibre and marine corps exercises. "Brogan wanted to lose a few pounds so I decided to keep her company"; but he's feeling self-indulgent today, Brogan is out, and Tom assures him the smaller Kit Kat has only 50 calories.

Twenty-five years on, Dudley has simply travelled too far beyond the fringe—beyond the worthy masochism of Thatcher's Britain

Outside his windows, the morning fog has not yet lifted and the terns are huddled together in their fenced-off corral by the public lavatories. Inside, the house is decorated in pale beach tones, with lacquered wood floors and expensive rough hewn furniture, a style known hereabouts as California casual; and the master fits right in, sitting comfortably in jeans and white high-top Reeboks in front of a blazing log fire. There is



California casual: "I spend my whole life playing the piano," says Moore. "That's the reality"

the merest touch of grey in his shoulder-length hair and only the slightest suggestion of an additional crease or two in his countenance, which at the present time is uncharacteristically frowning. The subject is the British Press and their fixation with the Hollywoodisation of Dudley.

"There's this little paragraph that they insert in every piece they write these days," he complains . . . 'Dudley Moore, five-foot-two, sex thimble, married to statuesque Brogan Lane . . .' That's what I'm reduced to. I think it's absurd, it's thick to think that's all there is to me. But I can assure everybody in England that I've had no commercial success since *Ten* and *Arthur*. "He chuckles wickedly, and not without bitterness. "I'm really not doing too well at all so they can now breathe a sigh of relief."

In film terms it's true. *Arthur II*, or more properly *Arthur on the Rocks*, the sequel to his \$100 million hit *Arthur* has not been embraced by the

American critics (it opens in Britain in December). It follows alas, a small succession of box office failures: *Six Weeks with Mary Tyler Moore*, *Lovesick*, *Unfaithfully Yours* a remake of the old Rex Harrison comedy, *Best Defence*, with Eddie Murphy, *Micki and Maude* in which our intrepid hero copes with a wife and a mistress delivering his babies on the same day in the same hospital, *Santa Claus*, the movie in which he played an ambitious elf, and *Like Father Like Son* in which he exchanged bodies with his teenage offspring.

While the blame for all of this was placed a long way from Dudley's slim shoulders, he knows he's fallen victim to the great American dream cycle – build 'em up fast and knock 'em down even faster. "I was going through this old box of clippings the other day, and it was all 'Dudley Moore's English and he was in *Beyond the Fringe*' and there was this whole air of respectability. Isn't-it-wonderful sort of thing. Now

it's fuck Dudley time. Get back where you came from. Then you can come out of obscurity and we'll discover you again."

The unaccustomed carping has caused him to re-evaluate where he is and why. "I just ended up here," he explains, after some thought. "Peter and I did *Good Evening* here on the stage. We were in Los Angeles for six weeks. If I stayed six weeks in any place I'd probably get fond of it."

But the real reason he admits was Tuesday Weld who was later to become his second wife. "She'd been touring with me to all these terrible places, so when she said she wanted to get back into the film world in L.A, it seemed only fair that I set down with her. I'm not a tax exile. There was over a year when I didn't have a job here. I spent my time playing the piano in a garage. I was with a woman who wanted to stay here and I wanted to be with her."

*He know's he's
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even faster*

The answer, of course, is too easy. California living suits him. We remember a conversation with him six years ago in which we were contrasting the way perfect strangers in California pour out their entire life history 10 seconds after meeting you, while in England you can live next door to someone for 20 years and never know their first name. "I prefer to hear the whole life story," he said then, "I want to hear about people. I don't see what's wrong with that. I don't want to wait 15 years or 15 seconds. I want intimacy with the people who want it with me."

He bought into the pursuit of happiness, appliquéd onto the American flag along with the stars, and he still does. "Happiness is such a nebulous, evanescent sort of thing," he says, wiping the tell-tale traces of chocolate from his mouth. "I think people probably thought when I was complaining about myself, which I used to do a great deal publicly, that I must be happy because suffering obviously meant my mind was alive. They think suddenly everything's shut off – 'Oh he must have taken an aspirin or two because he's happy'."

On the Venice Beach, he, like the terns, has found a sanctuary, a self-created nest in which the agonies of his childhood, the humiliations suffered by the tiny boy with the club foot are

forgotten. In doing so, however, he is not blind to the occasional sillinesses of California or the ugliness of the *nouveau riche*, the garish piles he sees every time he steps outside his front door. "It's the worst collection of shit I've ever seen in my life, the strangest conglomeration of colour and design. I'm not fond of the area at all but I love this house. Once I'm in here, it's gorgeous. I love the feeling of it. I'm not one who walks out onto the street and needs to see the Pantheon!"

Nor does it worry him he says that the conversation around him in a town obsessed with box office receipts, psycho babble and deal making may be occasionally less than stimulating. He has his music. The house is equipped with a small recording studio and a couple of pianos including a battered upright imported by Brogan from his childhood home in Dagenham, Essex. He does increasingly heavyweight concerts—from the Hollywood Bowl and Rhapsody in Blue with the Los Angeles Philharmonic he's gone on to Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Chamber Society, and the Brahms Triple Concerto with Itzhak Perlman and Yo Yo Ma. Earlier this year he played the Lord High Executioner in a Jonathan Miller version of *The Mikado*. And he has his books. He's reading, he says, all the stuff he should have read years earlier like Goethe and Dickens. California is about nothing if not self-improvement.

"You know Tom who works for us is reading a book about increasing his word power, and I'm fascinated that after years of school, where it was very hard for him to learn because of difficult and punitive situations, that now he can get into it. Same with me. I'm practising more than I ever did as much as I should have done in years gone by."

And like a good Californian, spurred on by Brogan, he's discovering exercise and the outdoors. Peter Cook has great sport with the image of sporting Dudley. "He had the grace to apologise on one level for the picture he painted in the *Vanity Fair* piece of Brogan sort of with a whip out to me, but not on another, because he really means it and he thinks it's an astute and perceptive observation. I think it's great that Brogan's got me out on my feet. We do tennis twice a week now and we don't do very well at it. We're awful as a matter of fact but I must say it is, in the end, enjoyable. I'm going skiing at the end of the year. I don't really enjoy it totally but I do quite enjoy it at times."

He is at pains to point out however, that there is more to Dudley than a New Age stereotype. "I haven't suddenly become this Jock who's on a diet, who jogs, who's joined the Hollywood vacuity. I spend my whole life playing the piano, and in the recording studio. That's the reality."

It shouldn't surprise his colleagues from the *Fringe* that his future turned out so differently from theirs. Not a writer like Cook or Bennett, or a certified genius like Miller, he was this funny little organ scholar who could play anything. "Peter did the major part of the writing. He was the most prolific of all of us," says Dudley. "I'm

very spontaneous in some comedic settings but I'm not a great font of innovative ideas. I didn't really contribute that much to the production pieces so I always felt a little peripheral because they were dealing in areas I knew nothing about, except musically where I knew more than the three of them put together. There was not a musician among them. I had to struggle to come up with a solo bit and finally I did a send-up of Beethoven based on Colonel Bogie. I was desperate the night before the opening, so I took the most ridiculous song I could think of and that was it."

He's recording furiously these days, spurred by Brogan who has driven him back to the studio, with saxophonist Kenny Gee, to do an album of ballads he's written over the years. "I was mixing it the other night in the studio and

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thank God I was on my own in there. I was bawling tears and making a complete ass of myself. It's all Brogan's fault and I really admire her for her persistence on my behalf."

The festivities for Mrs Moore's birthday were heavily on his mind as we talked. The balloon lady delivered decorations for the party and the Pritiken lady arrived with repasts for the next three days. Meanwhile Dudley was arranging his own birthday surprise, a collection of animal sculptures for the garden—deers, birds, a St Francis of Assisi ("Brogan loves him") to be discovered *in situ* by the lady of the house, on the day.

He makes no attempt to deny the obvious, that second childishness reigns supreme. "Is it the blissful childhood I never had? Maybe. I don't mind people commenting on that. It's when they do it with that slight sneer which I basically respond to with the word—bollocks! Its a sort of 'Aha—so that's what it is. Now do

you want to come home and do something sensible and grown up?' As if there's something more important, deeply nationalistically worthy that I should be doing. My life is centred round a piano with a little bit of acting and I can do that anywhere, even on this stranger than strange beach."

While his former colleagues are easing apparently comfortably into their declining years Dudley doesn't feel the need. Living in California means never having to say you're middle-aged. "Of course Peter would respond to that by saying there's a whole lot of face-lifted androids on the beach in California. And Jonathan would say—bless his heart—they've all got to learn to die. He'll say it with that massive melancholia in his tone, as if trying to make yourself feel okay and have a youthful attitude is somehow wrong. Because I'm small and look youngish people assume I'm not developing in that grown-up way I should. But I'm doing fine in here," he says pointing to his head.

Peter Cook himself, Dudley is not averse to pointing out, tried to make it in Hollywood playing an English butler on a show, pinched from British television. It failed rather ingloriously. "The trouble was, Peter was apologising all the time for being here and it showed in his work. If he'd made it big here, he would have been at home with it and relaxed and enjoyed it. But because maybe it didn't work, and God knows we've all had our failures, there's this strange residual contempt that happens."

He looks around the room taking in the house, the toys, the beach beyond, the appurtenances of success American style and he sighs, "I'm not a materialistic sort of person, really. I was just as comfortable when I came from college on 10 bob a week, sharing a kitchen, living on cornflakes much of the time. I've always been happy. No I haven't always been happy but I've been optimistic about work. 'Cos if you can play an instrument, you can play in a bar, in a show, in a jazz club. When I was a choir boy I earned one and sixpence for a wedding and a guinea if I played the organ, and one day there were five of them and I got five guineas. Can you imagine what that was like when I was 16. I was in heaven."

Thirty-seven years on, battered by critics and the intellectually snobbish disapproval of visiting firemen from England, ensconced in his comforting seaside womb, he struggles to express himself, to explain how he sees his future.

"I feel—God, what is the word—content. I realise happiness for me is being able to do the things I want to do—to become a concert artist, to be a little scholarly in certain directions. I have really different values now. I don't believe in any sort of theistic gift but I do believe I have a talent and it's my duty for my sake to develop it. I feel an urgency to do it now before my memory fades, before I can no longer do it physically. I'm having a great time transcribing people off records and practising, learning pieces I've never done before. How can I explain that to people in the UK. They either get it or they don't" ■



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THE MAN IN QUESTION

Jonathan Miller by Marcel Berlins

Jonathan Miller is not enjoying being an Englishman at present. He doesn't like Thatcher's Britain, he despises our opera and theatre critics and he is an intellectual in a country which has little time for intellectuals. He is tired, too, "of being described as a jack of all trades by people who are jacks of none".

If he were French, he would be a nationally revered figure, overwhelmed with honours and praise, and admired by all for his intelligence, versatility and learning. In England, such a person is considered too clever by half, pretentious and a swot.

The components of Miller's malaise are, for the most part, nothing new. But the vehemence of his feelings and the level of his disenchantment are stronger than ever before. At the moment he is especially annoyed at the criticism of his first season as artistic director of the Old Vic. It was, he insists, far from the catastrophe some of the invertebrates have suggested. In-

you're in the theatre, you get critics. People say: they're trivial, why does it matter so much? But even invertebrate parasites often cause the death of a large warm-blooded mammal. Critics are responsible not just for putting bums on seats, but for your general sense of well-being or otherwise. I can't bear the euphoria that their good opinions produce or the commiserating gloom that comes with their bad opinions. They're loathsome. I hate them."

That said, Miller was happy to turn to other subjects, though every now and again he reverted to the main theme, in case I had failed to appreciate his feelings towards invertebrates. He speaks animatedly, exuberantly, answering questions without hesitation, rarely searching for a word or concept. He was friendly, charming and witty, even when venomous; but he didn't pretend to be a contented man.

It is 27 years and a few months since *Beyond the Fringe* exploded onto a shocked and delighted

dabbled with success in television, directed films, written books and lectured all over the world. Yet *Beyond the Fringe* is his constant ghost; it forced a change of path upon him.

"I still have very equivocal views about *Beyond the Fringe*. It's something about which I'm enormously proud and I had an enormously enjoyable time while I did it. But it really did divert me from something I intended to do, that I wanted to do, that I was enthusiastic about scientific neurology. On the other hand it's given me all sorts of things I would never have had. I've had a much jollier life. I've been all over the world. I've met and become friends with a much wider range of people than if I'd continued medicine. There is something rather grey about institutional medicine these days.

"I feel remorse for the teachers who invested so much in me and felt there was a future for me, and I feel remorse for myself because I think I could have made a contribution. I feel like Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*: "I coulda been a contender."

He twice tried seriously to re-enter the medical world. "It didn't work. I was older. I'd already become ill at ease in anything other than the easy bohemian life you lead in the theatre. I was competing with young men who were hungrier and more eager. I'd grown lazy."

Miller's laziness would be any other man's frenetic activity. Ever since *Beyond the Fringe* decreed that he would make his living largely from the performing arts, he has led an extraordinary double life. The part that the public sees, on stage, in television, in books like *The Body in Question*, is matched by intensive study of the subjects he really cares about. His rambling office at the Old Vic contains few books on the theatre; but everywhere there are tomes on cognitive psychology, the philosophy of the mind and neurology.

"Directing is what I fit in between reading these books" he says. His friends, the people he admires, come more from the scientific and intellectual world than from the artistic. Only Alan Bennett among his *Beyond the Fringe* colleagues qualifies. "Alan and I have much in common because both of us are, I think, academics *manqués*. He's a thoughtful, well-read man. He's an intellectual. He would recoil at being called that, but he is." Miller and his GP wife Rachel (their three children are grown up) live across the road from Bennett, in Gloucester Crescent, Camden Town's famous media-intellegentsia street.

"Even at the time, the four of us were not that cohesive. We collaborated quite abrasively on the show, had lots of differences, met only when we did the shows, and went our separate ways." Today, he sees Peter Cook and Dudley Moore rarely, though last year Moore played in a



Miller: too clever by half. "I feel isolated . . . I know what I know: I can't help knowing it"

vertebrates, an interviewer soon learns, is his word for theatre critics. He does not like them, takes their criticism personally, and admits to paranoia. "I can't bear the impudence of the creatures. They're a chronic disease of the business. If you were a district commissioner in Africa, you'd get malaria and footworm. If

public. It's not much of an anniversary, perhaps, but for Miller it's more than half of his life-time distant. The thought makes him wince. He is too courteous to wonder aloud why he keeps being asked about something which ended a quarter century ago. Since that time, he has performed astonishing feats in the theatre and opera; he has

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Mikado directed by Miller in Los Angeles; "Dudley and I get on very well. But we don't have any common interests and concerns. It's a relationship based entirely on the work." He gives the impression that most of his relationships with people in theatre and opera are superficial in that way.

Miller is not convinced that he would have been happier staying in scientific neurology, but thinking of it allows him another anti-invertebrate dig: "At least in science the scrutiny you come under is the scrutiny of your peers. It's often difficult and harsh, but you've really got to look to your laurels. In the theatre, such laurels as there are, are torn off you by nitwits." And even though he acknowledges that the academic and scientific world has its fair share of malice, backbiting and pettiness, "when you bleach out all that, what you are left with is a major contribution to knowledge; but a play is just a play, briefly applauded."

He apologises for appearing to denigrate the medium that feeds him, and insists, convincingly, that he does become impassioned by the plays he directs; indeed he has written an important book on theatre direction. But he admits he would rather be doing something else: "reading, thinking and writing." He has made a profound study of the history of mesmerism in 18th century England. He is interested in the history of the dichotomy between the analogue and the homologue and wants to delve deeper.

Miller has a curious residue of guilt that he is not contributing in some important way to the sum of human knowledge. In spite of more than 20 years of doing and creating, he considers him-

self primarily as a thinker. "I was raised in a family where the things regarded as important were somehow to do with achievements in the life of the mind. I think of myself as belonging to a European intellectual tradition. My great uncle was the French philosopher Henri Bergson. My father, a psychiatrist who was taught philosophy by Bertrand Russell, was an intellectual. My mother was one and I think of myself as one. But if you say that, you qualify for another six years in *Private Eye*." A journal which he detests and which of course is owned by Peter Cook.

"I feel isolated because I've been somehow slotted into the position of being this 'too clever by half' creature that claims to know too much. I know what I know. I can't help knowing it," he says. His resigned restlessness with his métier and his reputation is now accompanied by a disenchantment, for the first time, with England. "It's become a rancorous, rather unpleasant place under Mrs Thatcher. It's acquisitive, materialistic, and there's a gradual deterioration of the public domain, as is shown in simple things like the rubbish that accumulates in the street and the rubbish that accumulates on television. It's the kind of culture in which things that are publicly owned are disregarded in favour of what is privately preserved." He thinks he could be happy in Italy eventually.

"What I would really like to do when I finish at the Old Vic (he has another year to go as artistic director) is to buy some time away from this kind of life. But it's not easy. Classical theatre, which is what I do, doesn't really pay, and you can't suddenly decide to have a smash hit. Most things which are smash hits involve material

with which I could not enter into a profitable relationship. I could not have borne to have done *Cats*. For my production of *Rigoletto*, which has probably made a million, I got £9,000." He was not complaining. He lacks the mercenary instinct and has never been known to do anything purely for the money.

He says he will never direct opera in this country again. "I'm so pissed off with having to swallow the diet of criticism from English opera critics. I make no money out of it and I get pissed on. I just don't like getting written about by these people. You lose on the swings and on the roundabouts. If they write that badly about you, you can take two alternative views. Either they're right and I'm no good, in which case there's no point in going on. Or they're wrong about me and I am good but I'm not well-received, so there's no point in going on." He puts opera critics on an even higher plane of malice than their theatre counterparts—"a slightly more favourable community".

Miller has no great plans for his future in the theatre, either. "There is no play I really badly want to do. There never has been." He likes going back to plays he has directed before, reworking and developing them, in effect providing a commentary on his previous production. But even that has been spoiled for him. "On the continent, that's acceptable, and they find it interesting to see how a play has developed over a period of time. But in this trivial, silly world, if you're not constantly producing novelty the invertebrates regard you as clapped out. 'His imagination has failed', they say, 'he's not jerking us off in a new way'" ■

PRIME TIME AT LAST

Alan Bennett by Nicholas de Jongh

"I'm quite reconciled to myself as I am" says Alan Bennett gravely, as if destiny had handed him down a hard-life sentence. There he sits on a late Sunday afternoon in the murky basement of his large house in N.W.1, a district which succumbed long ago to his satirical pricks.

The room is cluttered, festooned with sombre Victorian photographs and a wooden working table. Through the tiny, barred window peeps some watery autumnal sun, on which Mr Bennett has determinedly set his back. The weather and the mood is distinctly Alan Bennett, and the author is playing his favourite parlour game of melancholia, with the rules and skills he has perfected over almost quarter of a century. Yet cheerfulness insists on breaking through. A wry, determined laughter with which depression is kept at bay.

At the age of 54 Alan Bennett looks like the one member of the original *Beyond the Fringe* quartet most likely to last beyond his mortal span. Bennett has become a country, or at least a

portion of northern England which has never before had its due distinction. It is a place whose capital is probably West Hartlepool or Morecambe, rather than the Leeds from which he originally came and to whom his mind goes back on such frequent, joyful raiding missions.

It's a place—this Bennett country—where the people are mostly old or middle-aged, disappointed or putting up. Reserved or loquacious they become in the Bennett filtering process grave eccentrics, whose turn of mind, with their almost surreal associations and quaint phraseology, have marked them out as different.

Bennett has taken time to come into his own. *Better Late*, the first undergraduate revue in which he appeared at the Edinburgh Festival of 1959, sums it up neatly. One year later there he was—*Beyond the Fringe*—with the spectacles, the throaty pedantic voice of an elderly curate or the desiccated academic which his first class degree in history entitled him to become.

In *The Fringe* Bennett was set against three

seminal extroverts, whom he scarcely knew. Yet early Bennett, on his own evidence, was no put-upon, walk-over. "I wasn't easy to get on with" he insists. "I was quite competitive." But for this competitive man *The Fringe* brought no immediate rewards. While the other three were quickly engaged with fame and fortune on television, Bennett headed almost at once for the "doldrums", as he calls it, that territory which he has since learned to mine so richly. Becalmed and given over to sketch writing for Ned Sherrin's late night satire shows, Bennett longed "to be something else besides being funny." And the funniness of *Beyond the Fringe*, on which his flimsy reputation rested, was somehow forgotten. With a typical line in self depreciation Bennett loves to tell the story of how he was invited to a grand dinner at 10 Downing Street in the Wilson years, only to find the Prime Minister questioning his bona fides. "You weren't one of the original four, were you?" said the amazed Premier who prided himself and forever

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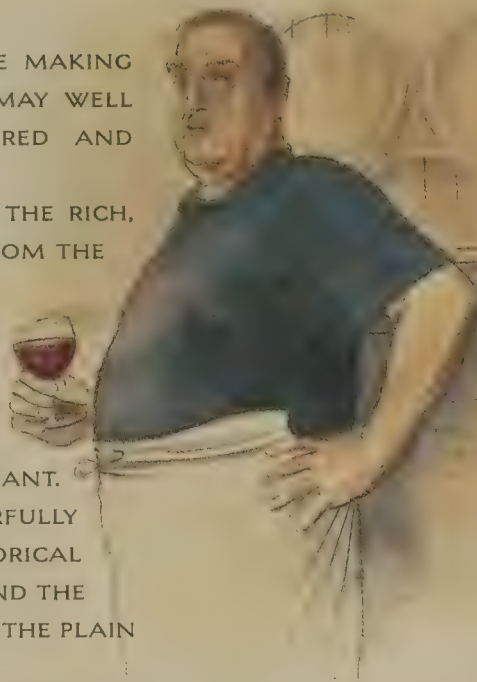
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Better late: Alan Bennett always longed "to be something else besides being funny"

reminded us that he forgot nothing. "Well I don't remember you. Are you sure?" And the forgotten man commented long after: "I felt like Trotsky must have felt when he was cut out of the history of the revolution."

"Cut out," the phrase is so utterly Bennett, with its sense of exclusion, of missing the good things, and his reference back to a distant past. Nostalgia was to prove the making of Alan Bennett. It has proved to be a kind of creative illness for him, an itch in his psyche for which the balm has been his plays. In the beginning was *Forty Years On*, "a half-way house between revue and theatre" as Bennett shrewdly calls it now, with its snobbish, literary recollections of distant, dead artistic life. But it was not until the 1970s that Bennett really began to look back usefully to the Leeds working class from which he had risen with so many, half hidden traces. His father, a Leeds butcher, his mother whose signs of an utterly lost memory he has recorded so memorably, his cluster of "aunties", one of whom worked in a Leeds shoe shop, became springboards back to his family's hyper private lives and manners. His parents never realised the way they were being slightly memorialised. "Dad died in 1974 and I didn't start writing plays on the north until 1972," he reminds us. "And my mother really didn't think the characters were like her."

Although or perhaps because he has never married, women have become Bennett's theatrical and television metier. Women from the Leeds

working class: Doris dying quietly in *A Cream Cracker* under the settee, Maggie Smith as the dentist's wife with dreams of upward mobility who puts her husband down and only once lets him have her horizontal or Maggie Smith, again, as the wife given up to alcohol and a Vicar husband who has more or less given her up. The despair and incidental comedy to which they are surrendered makes his work authentically bitter-sweet in a way that Noel Coward's operetta of the same name never was.

Hymns make him weep, he concedes readily, because they whisk him back to the haven of childhood, and remind him of the march of "envious and calumniating time". To explain what he means he recalls the Michael Apted television documentary in which a group of people, now all about 30 years old, had been filmed at six-yearly intervals ever since early childhood. "It was," he says "a wonderful programme. All of them were sad, even those who had fulfilled their aspirations. Time had made them sad you see. I think it's seeing yourself as you were and comparing it with how you are now... if only you'd known..." Time and knowledge always acquired too late are, then, in Bennett's view natural enemies. But then the pain is challenged by laughter. You think of Guy Burgess and Russia so dynamically recollected in *An Englishman Abroad*, or *Kafka's Dick* at the Royal Court, where a writer who never felt at home in a world he never made, is rendered as a kind of comic and honorary Englishman, at the mercy of the

biographical industry who breathe dead writers falsely back to life.

The Prime of Mr Alan Bennett is thus upon us. He has made his own country and extended it beyond Hartlepool. Dramatists in middle age and in England tend to dry up these days. He has not. Ample dramatic and television propositions jostle for attention. The potential extends while Bennett makes a great show of suggesting that his life has contracted. "I go to Marks and Spencer largely, that's my day," he claims. He hankers after New York which curiously, he loves. "Only dreams of leaving—a wonderful title for that play of David Hare's," he says. He rails, as he has for ten years, about London and Londoners. "Surly" is the word he used in 1978 and again in 1988 to describe us and our aggressiveness. He notices and laments the littered streets of Camden.

But Bennett is not truly the old fogey with reactionary views, deploring the decline and fall of the city. He belongs firmly on almost every available fence. He reads *The Independent*. He is the child of the new morality. He hates the kind of people who believe the '60s should be wiped out of folk memory, all its influences condemned as malignant.

His political sympathies are forever wavering at the centre or left of centre. He deals in social not political satire. Alan Bennett, in short, is both what he seems and the reverse of that. And of the four *Fringe* creators he seems to have exceeded his own relatively modest aspirations. The duodenal ulcer he now nurses is not the product of gnawing ambition or chronic anxiety, but of a drug given for inflammation of the knee which went wrong.

Bennett looks at the life and works of the other three with a certain cool distantness. None of them, he says, are particularly close friends. He is more awkward, he thinks, with Jonathan than the others "because with him being so ebullient you have to make space for yourself". He reserves the warmest words for Peter Cook, "the only one of us who really wanted the fame. There's no humbug about Peter and I like his terrible rage."

The four men shared something—a show—more than a quarter of a century ago and have gone their separate ways since then. But Bennett insists that his way forward is not to stay in Bennett country, the world he has created. "I'm a refugee from all that."

Philip Larkin, he thinks, in a pointed comparison, was eventually marooned in his own territory, the springs of inspiration dried up, and he had retreated into himself totally. He tells the story of how a writer, once at Hull when Larkin had been librarian there, tried to shelter under the poet's umbrella, during a burst of rain at a bus stop. But as he gradually insinuated himself closer Larkin turned and spoke to him. "If you think you're coming under my umbrella, you're mistaken." Alan Bennett, by contrast, has put up an umbrella in a long rainy season and sheltered much of England with its bright consolations for bad times ■

TERRY O'NEIL

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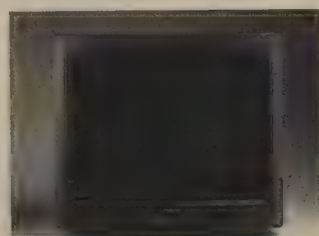
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Great Escapes



In the best country house hotels service is discreetly attentive, small touches more pleasing than grand gestures. To discover sanctuaries from seasonal madness we savoured six of the finest in England

Marcel Berlins at Lucknam Park, Wiltshire

I was the wrong writer for this assignment. "Not *another* splendid Georgian house, in a stunning 280-acre park, converted at huge cost into an exquisitely tasteful luxury hotel," I complained. I am not an enthusiast for country house hotels. In them I have eaten some of the least appealing traditional English (or pretend-French) food of my career, slept on some of the most uncomfortable traditional English beds and been bored by some of the most objectionable English soaks, masquerading as fellow guests or mine hosts.

"This one's different," said the travel editor. And it was. Take the service, for instance. French hotels and restaurants always get it right; English ones, however hard they try, never seem to master it. The "it" is that delicate balance between, at one extreme, being too attentive, fawning and false-friendly, with constant irritating interrogations ("Is everything all right?") and, at the other, that over-casual, inattentive, resentful attitude that has become a speciality of so many English waiters and hotel-staff. Lucknam Park gets it absolutely right—courtesy without deference, efficiency without oppression.

I expected for my money, and got, spacious and elegant public rooms, designed in restrained country house style, and comfortable bedrooms, pleasantly furnished in a combination of real and repro, each with its own flower motif. It was the little thoughtful extras that impressed: breakfast in the room that came not only exactly on time but, a rarity, hot; valet parking; a real harpist at

dinner and no piped music; umbrellas for guests who had not brought theirs; and, miraculously, excellent coffee rather than the watered black dust the secret formula of which only English hotels seem to have.

But Lucknam Park's principal glories are two-fold:—its food and its "leisure spa". The combination is irresistible. It provides gastronomy without guilt, a luxurious experience without the accompanying twinges of shame. Chef Anthony Blake managed to get a Michelin star at his last restaurant and I have little doubt he will soon be awarded the honour again. The menu is entirely in English, but the inspiration is French; the knowledgeable *sommelier* has some particularly interesting French regional wines to recom-

mend; and the presentation of food and wine matches that of Michelin-starred restaurants across the Channel.

The spa (most facilities are free to hotel guests, but it is also a club in its own right) has a large indoor swimming pool, a jacuzzi, saunas, a gymnasium, a steam room, a solarium, snooker, a variety of massage and beauty treatments and a very helpful staff. There are tennis courts and a croquet lawn.

They are taking pains to get their mix of guests right, too. It opened only in the summer, but it has already become a popular venue for small conferences. But the management will not allow a conference to make up more than half its clients, unless it takes over the whole 39-room



From under-butler to chambermaid, Chilston Park, top and right, boasts a traditional complement of domestic staff. After dinner, guests can play billiards, cast an eye over the 10,000 books or take coffee by an open fire. Lucknam Park, left, boasts both food and spa. The service is faultless here. Before a Michelin-starred meal guests can wallow in the jacuzzi or surrender to the steam room



CHILSTON PARK PHOTOGRAPHS: CLIVE BOURSNEILL

hotel. Quiet Americans are starting to come, it has been discovered by Japanese businessmen, and a French couple on our weekend were silent and glowering at each other, a sure sign that they were having a good time. At dinner, rich toffs from the area made up the numbers.

For Christmas, Lucknam Park is going all the way—carols, midnight mass, Santa Claus in a Victorian horse-drawn carriage, the local hunt meet, a dinner-dance and perpetual bubbly, plus food and the absolutely essential spa. Lucknam Park is not cheap (they have to make their £4 million conversion costs back somehow), but at that end of the market it is far from outrageous.

Lucknam Park (Colerne, Wiltshire. Tel: 0225 742777) offers double rooms, including a superior continental breakfast, at £95 a night; and dinner is not excessive at £27.50 per person for everything except wine. Two-night winter breaks at £140 per person include breakfast and dinner. The Christmas weekend

will come to nearer £900 for two for three nights, all meals and activities included. A special New Year deal, with masked ball, is also available.

Chilston Park, Lenham, Kent

Martin and Judith Miller bought Chilston Park four years ago. This Grade-1 listed manor house, built in the 13th century and later remodelled, stands in 250 acres of parkland on the edge of the handsome village of Lenham.

The Millers publish *Miller's Antiques Price Guide*, a copy of which is proudly displayed on bedside tables—a splendid offering for insomniacs. Not surprisingly, the house is richly stocked with etchings, drawings, prints, paintings, antique rugs and furniture. Interspersed among these are snapshots of the owners with their daughters.

The house specialises in old-world hospitality



A bedroom at Bailiffscourt: far from pretentious, this country house hotel is one of the most relaxed

and service. A young man dressed in Victorian footman's uniform appears to help new arrivals with their luggage. In the rooms, maids in starched caps and aprons turn the beds down, fuss with the curtains and show you how to switch the television on. "We have a traditional complement of domestic staff," says the blurb, "including butler, under-butler, footmen, boots, parlour and chambermaids who look forward to greeting you." You might find it all just a little over-bearing.

At dusk over 200 candles are lit at Chilston, so that you can imagine what it was like without electricity. Dinner is formal, served in one of the two small dining rooms, but there is a larger room for banquets and business conferences. The chef, Denis Lobry, worked for the Roux brothers and their loss is certainly Chilston's gain. His four-course menu provides an excellent choice—the grilled king prawns with garlic, and salmon in a light cream sauce, were delicious when we visited. The lamb noisettes were equally tasty but sadly the duck breast did not live up to expectations. The rum and chocolate cake, however, is not to be missed. All this was accompanied with wines from Judith Miller's substantial and balanced list, and throughout the meal service was impeccable. For those who wish simply to be alone, dinner can be served in the privacy of your room, beside a log fire.

Chilston also boasts some well-converted stables; 25 of the total 40 rooms are in the stables. Sporting people are catered for: fishing, clay and rough shooting are popular. And should you wish to venture out for a day, Canterbury, Maidstone and Rochester are near, as are numerous Kentish gardens and stately homes. Leeds Castle, for example, is only four miles away.

MARY CORCORAN

Chilston Park (Sandway, Lenham, Maidstone, Kent. Tel: 0622 859803) offers two-nights, including

dinner, bed, breakfast and one lunch from £130 per person. Christmas and New Year deals available.

Bailiffscourt, Climping, West Sussex

Standing in grounds of 23 acres—home to squirrels, rabbits and a peacock—Bailiffscourt is situated on a reclusive stretch of the West Sussex coast, not far from Littlehampton. With its weathered façade of golden Somerset stone, its mullioned windows and heavy oak doors, it looks several centuries old. In fact it was built less than 60 years ago, the pet project of Walter Guinness, later Lord Moyne, who lavished money on its construction. Architectural features—salvaged from derelict and demolished medieval houses—were brought to Bailiffscourt to ensure the finished building looked genuine.

Throughout the hotel the décor is a subtle combination of genuine antiques and reproduction pieces which complement the "medieval" architecture. In the pretty bedrooms, thick towelling robes and complimentary toiletries are among the little luxuries. Downstairs, the maze of small reception rooms surrounding the courtyard are genuinely inviting. Their tapestries, oriental rugs and comfortable armchairs create a



Priory Hotel: tasteful luxury by the River Frome

restful atmosphere that is not in the least grand, in the worst sense, or pretentious.

Dinner is as formal as guests wish to make it. While jeans are unacceptable, jackets and ties for men are not *de rigueur* although the management prefers them. Tables in the dining room—which boasts Lord Nelson's medical chest among its antiques—are well spaced so there is no sense of being cramped or overlooked, and service from the staff is efficient but unobtrusive.

English chef, Jonas Tester, provides an imaginative dinner menu. Served by candlelight, and complemented by an extensive wine list, the dishes are attractively presented: a tiny pastry fish swam through the butter sauce which accompanied the salmon mousse, while a brilliant raspberry coulis contrasted beautifully with the pallor of a poached vanilla pear.

Bailiffscourt is an ideal touring centre: Arundel, Goodwood and Chichester are nearby, and walkers will enjoy the local beach and countryside. Sporty types can play golf at Littlehampton or ride the ponies stabled in the grounds. The hotel has much to recommend it for a winter retreat: a fine setting, an unstuffy atmosphere and the attraction of log fires on cold evenings.

LORA SAVINO

Bailiffscourt Hotel (Climping, Nr Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 5RW Tel: 0903 723511) offers two-night weekend breaks this winter from £86 to £122 per person for double room and breakfast, four-course table d'hôte dinner £25. Christmas and New Year deals available.

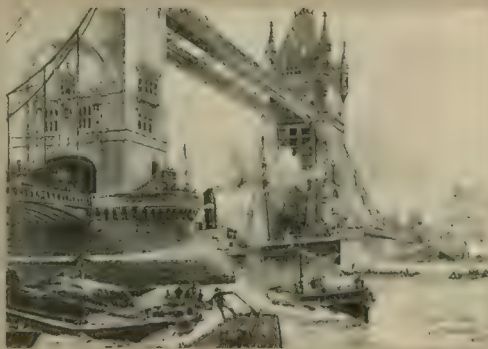
Priory Hotel, Wareham, Dorset

The Priory Hotel is typically English, a low rambling house, its shaven lawns stretching to the edge of the River Frome at Wareham, where swans and sailboats cruise and walkers march along the tow path to Poole Harbour. The 16th-century stone Priory of Lady St Mary was a private house when John Turner, a Dorchester man, bought it 10 years ago. He has retained a homely atmosphere even in the public rooms, which are filled with family antiques. You will never feel the cold once tucked up here; you can even leave the windows open and still be warm.

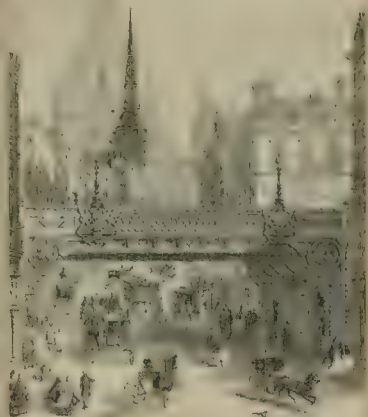
The bedrooms—there are 15, plus four suites in a converted clay barn close to the river—are the ultimate in tasteful luxury. No twee Laura Ashley fabrics here, instead bold country prints have been imaginatively made up into swirling drapes by a local woman. There are window seats and comfortable chairs, bowls of fruit, flowers, novels and books on the area. A blackboard by the staircase records requests for newspapers and early morning tea.

Breakfasts are gargantuan: it's a rare place that offers porridge, kidneys, kippers and smoked haddock, buttery croissants, oatcakes and six different kinds of tea. And the orange juice really is fresh. Most hotels finish breakfast at ten with no exceptions, but here we were telephoned late on Sunday morning and asked if we would like breakfast in our bedroom, to help digest the Sunday newspapers.

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The restaurant is situated in vaulted stone cellars which were discovered behind a walled-up entrance a few years ago. It specialises in English cooking. "We're very fond of game and offal down here," says Mr Turner, salivating at the thought. This is the place to try lambs' kidneys and sweetbreads in port, walnut and apple sauce. For the squeamish there are steaks, lamb and venison in season and excellent fish and seafood, including crab prepared by a local fisherman and mussels from Poole harbour. The gardener grows vegetables for the restaurant in his market garden nearby.

The Priory is a good base for exploring the Isle of Purbeck. All roads pass through Corfe, a couple of miles away, its ruined castle commanding the only gap through a solid ridge of chalk hills. The beautiful Purbeck coastline is fairly deserted, visited only by a handful of people out of season. The Dorset coastal path runs solid from Poole to West Lulworth and can be joined at a number of places. We started from the pretty stone-slatted village of Worth Matravers. The path leads to Winspit and along to Dancing Ledge, where Purbeck and Portland limestone have been quarried for centuries and used to construct London buildings, among them St Paul's Cathedral and the Bank of England.

There is a strong sense of community here, created by the area's remoteness—it's not on the way to anywhere—and by the powerful families who once controlled it: the Bonds of London's Bond Street, whose seat is an Elizabethan manor at Creech; the Banks of Kingston Lacy, landlords of Corfe and the whole of Studland Bay until this decade when it became the largest legacy ever left to the National Trust.

GILL CHARLTON

The Priory Hotel (Church Green, Wareham, Dorset. Tel: 09295 2772) offers two-night weekend breaks from £74 to £162 per person, including full breakfast and four-course table d'hôte dinner. Rooms 4, 21 and 22 and the riverside suites are particularly luxurious. Christmas and New Year deals available.

Middlethorpe Hall, York

Ten years ago Middlethorpe Hall throbbed to the beat of one of York's hottest nightspots. The cool, cream drawing room was then purple and black with stroboscopic lighting. When the club floundered, Historic House Hotels moved in to save this fine William III country house.

The refurbishment involved moving walls and creating new rooms. A local craftsman was commissioned to design the grand wooden staircase, and in the public rooms pseudo-Adam stucco has been applied. The work has been done with care and the overall impression is elegant, if in places a little too self-conscious.

The bedrooms might be too fussy for some tastes, with small-print wallpapers at odds with drapes and pictures and lamps and flower vases. Much of the furniture is genuine, other pieces are camouflaged with yards of gathered fabric. Pleasing details include the bathroom fixtures of brass and wood, a variety of sweet-smelling toi-



The house with trout: Maiden Newton in Dorset

leties and, in the bedroom, mineral water and biscuits beside the large, comfortable bed. The service is excellent at all times: the young, eager staff are anxious to please at all times.

The Hall offers two restaurants, capitalising on its proximity to York (one-and-a-half miles away) from where businessmen and celebrating families come to dine. The dining room is formal, jackets and ties are required dress, and the atmosphere earnest for the serious appreciation of good food. The wild duck, imaginatively arranged in a delicate orange sauce, and the succulent lamb, were good when we tasted them. Puddings tended towards the decorative, but a good selection of dessert wines compensated for this. Downstairs, the grill room is more relaxed, the fayre more robust.

Beyond the drapes, the 26 acres of parkland begin with a vast lawn and an overgrown lake. To one side vegetable gardens and fruit trees are furnished with garden ornaments—a fountain barely six inches high, a stone Eros camping in a side turning, numerous urns and arbours. But if such gardens are not to your taste, York Minster and The Shambles are an hour's stroll away, and, though it is down a busy road, Terry's chocolate factory is always worth exploring. In the opposite direction there are country walks along rivers threading through the Vale of York. In the main, though, Middlethorpe Hall is to be enjoyed lazily.

LAURA COTTON

Middlethorpe Hall (Bishopsthorpe Road, York YO12 1QP. Tel: 0904 641241) offers two-night champagne breaks in winter from £130 per person for room, breakfast and four-course dinner. Christmas and New Year deals available.



Middlethorpe Hall, York, in 26 acres of parkland

Maiden Newton House, Maiden Newton, Dorset

In a country house in Dorset, Bryan and Elizabeth Ferriss eat with their guests every night of the week around a single large table. For some people, the idea of feasting *en famille* with 14 candlelit strangers is wholly unappetising; but for those better disposed towards the human race it can offer splendid entertainment.

Everybody warms up with pre-dinner drinks. People make polite exchanges about Maiden Newton House—particularly its trout-rich chalk stream running through the grounds. Conversation over a drink or two will eventually expose links between people who have never met before and will probably never meet again. Somebody's son was at Oxford with somebody else's son. Nearly everybody in the room has at one time or other lived in Haslemere. And, if you're in luck, fate might serve up the odd mischievous twist: "Isn't that so-and-so and his wife . . . no, *that's* not his wife. Oh dear." For "the world and not his wife" early evening suicide in the chalk stream must have proposed itself as a blissful alternative to the impending communal supper.

With guests all seated, Mr and Mrs Ferriss come into their own, pouring, serving and talking with a determination to indulge everyone. The food, cooked by Elizabeth, is hearty. It would be impossible to feel hungry here. On the night in question "the world and not his wife" were fed on mackerel pâté, venison roasted with juniper berries, lemon meringue pie or vacherin, followed by an enormous trolley of Wessex cheeses.

The feeling of being pampered is most apparent in the bedrooms which offer white cotton sheets and blankets instead of duvets, and fresh flowers from the garden. On Sundays guests can expect to be woken by bells ringing from the church next door, followed by hymn singing.

Breakfast can be anything you choose, but the house speciality is porridge topped with whisky, demerara sugar and cream. The hunting fraternity, some of whom from the Shires stay regularly at Maiden Newton House, like this kind of solid fuel but for "the world and not his wife", creeping in late, it was clearly better to give it a miss. For those with doubtful hearts, the menu has a "low cholesterol corner".

To get away and be truly *alone* Chesil Beach and Abbotsbury, are short drives away. A walk around Abbotsbury and the swannery is always worthwhile: take the "permissive path" to St Catherine's Chapel set on top of a perfectly formed green hill. Dorchester, Yeovil and Lyme Regis are all short distances away.

SALLY RICHARDSON

Maiden Newton House (Maiden Newton, Dorchester, Dorset Tel: 0300 20336) offers bed and breakfast from £33 to £42 per person sharing a double room; four-course dinner costs £16 a head including the wine. Maiden Newton House is a perfect place for a weekend away with a group of friends and can be hired for house parties of up to 10 people ■



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She is tiny with formidable energy. She is both delicate and vividly expressive. And in the competitive world of ballet she has risen to the most coveted roles in the way that real stars do—by dancing in the place of an injured soloist. Only 21, The Royal Ballet's Viviana Durante is already touted as

A NAME OF THE NINETIES

By Julia Pascal

Viviana Durante's sudden journey to fame came last April. She was dancing cygnets and peasants in *Swan Lake* when the ballerina Maria Almeida injured herself on stage and no understudy could be found. "I was looking forward to an early night," Durante remembers "when Vergie Derman [Royal Ballet *répétiteur*] knocked on my dressing room door." Durante was told that the Royal Ballet director Anthony Dowell wanted to speak to her urgently. "I thought I must have done something awful but when I saw him he asked me if I knew any of the third act from *Swan Lake*?"

Fortunately Durante knew the famous 32 *fouetté* sequence danced by Odile because it

appears in the *Don Quixote pas de deux*. But she knew nothing of act four. "I told him I'd have a go." The drama of the evening is still vivid. "Maria Almeida went back on for act three. But, after the *pas de deux* she was in pain and pushed me on for the *fouettés*. Normally, by act three the ballerina is really tired but naturally I was quite fresh." This virtuoso moment is the high point of the act and audiences often count the *fouettés* as the dancer pirouettes on one leg, while the other leg whips around at high speed. It is a marvellous feat and the strain put on the supporting left leg is tremendous. At this performance the audience hardly realised that Almeida had been replaced by Durante but during the interval Dowell

informed them of the Hollywood-style drama.

The audience were thrilled by Durante's emergency act three performance. But, while Dowell was onstage making the announcement, she had only 10 minutes backstage to learn act four. This is the finale where the betrayed Swan Queen, Odette, tells Prince Siegfried that his treachery means her impending death. With no preparation, Durante improvised the act, helped by her partner Jay Jolley and Donald MacLeary (*répétiteur* and coach), shouting out the mime sequence from the wings. "I could follow to a certain extent," remembers Durante, "but for the most part I had to make it up on the spot."

At the curtain she was showered with bouquets. "I think they were Maria's flowers," she says, "but anyway, they were throwing them at me." There was no time for nervousness. "But once I got home and realised exactly what had happened I felt exhausted after all the excitement." Since this experience she has been allowed to dance Odette/Odile on tour in Australia.

The dual role is the most coveted of ballerina parts. The pure White Swan Queen, Odette, becomes the exotic, seductive Black Queen Odile, in act three. This duality allows a dancer to portray both innocence and experience. Durante still prefers the Odile role. "It's difficult to act being pure like Odette. Although Odile is more technically demanding, the character is closer to mine. Odile appears to be far more emotional and dramatic and that's how I feel I am."

Twenty-one-year-old Viviana Durante was born in Rome. Her father is a bank manager, her mother a housewife. At seven she was taken to ballet school and at 10 she danced with Rome's Teatro del'Opera as one of the cats in *The Sleeping Beauty*. This appearance was her first lucky break. André Provosky, then director of the company, and his wife, former Kirov ballerina Galina Samsova, spotted Durante's nascent talent and suggested she train abroad. Galina Samsova remembers: "We thought she was really outstanding and we were upset at the low level of training she would have gone through if she'd stayed in Rome. So we suggested to Viviana's parents that she attend the Kirov or Royal Ballet Schools. They thought she would be hungry in Leningrad—probably quite rightly—and chose London. The problem was that children have to apply a year in advance for the Royal Ballet School and there wasn't space. Fortunately, one of the Australian students couldn't stand the discipline and I was asked if Viviana would like to replace her. Normally a child has to audition, but I was told that Viviana could come solely on my recommendation. I didn't dare call the school for six months but when I finally did I was told that everyone was delighted with her."

Ten-year-old Viviana was less delighted with her new life. She suffered homesickness and cried to go home. Today she remembers her misery. "I hated it. I couldn't speak English. The food was rotten. I wasn't keen on English food anyway and White Lodge food was particularly awful. But my parents said I should continue so I

stayed until I was 16." At 17 she joined the company. Two years as a *corps de ballet* member were followed by promotion to *coryphée*—half way between corps and solo work.

Now as a soloist she's at a crucial stage in her career. In December she dances Cinderella and in February makes her début as Juliet. After Odette/Odile in the famous 19th-century masterpiece by Marius Petipa, she's going for the great 20th-century ballerina roles. The late Frederick Ashton's much-loved *Cinderella* gives the comedy to the men as the ugly sisters in a ballet which is closer to pantomime knockabout than lyrical dance. The Cinderella role demands sweet innocence.

These two ballets—*Cinderella* and *Romeo and Juliet*—typify a Royal Ballet repertoire of the two contrasting masters: Ashton and MacMillan. And in these two works Durante will be able to display her dramatic range. Cinderella's sudden

*With star roles
awaiting her
she's all set
to be The Royal
Ballet's next
high-profile
ballerina*

projection into the spotlight as a servant magically claimed and enriched by her Prince has personal resonances; but Juliet is more demanding because it requires the ability to portray sexual passion in a 14-year-old girl. Viviana Durante may well be a MacMillan ballerina following in the footsteps of Lynn Seymour and the other former Royal Ballet Italian ballerina Alessandra Ferri. Ferri was never allowed to dance Odette/Odile and she followed MacMillan when he left the Company for the American Ballet Theatre two years ago. Next spring MacMillan was scheduled to stage a new full-length work at Covent Garden but his recent heart attack means it has been postponed for a year. Meanwhile Durante is being given the opportunity to explore roles in works by George Balanchine, David Bintley, Ashley Page, as well as old favourites like Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Galina Samsova has not seen Durante dance lately but she has high hopes for her protégée. "I haven't seen her in anything dramatic. She's a fine technician but I believe she has more than that. I'm so happy that she's come so far so quickly. I was feeling like her mother, her guardian. I never had children. I don't know what they're like. But Viviana keeps in touch with me." Obviously Samsova's judgment of the 10-year-old child has paid off.

But what is Durante's quality? She is tiny and slim offstage. On the rehearsal room floor it is

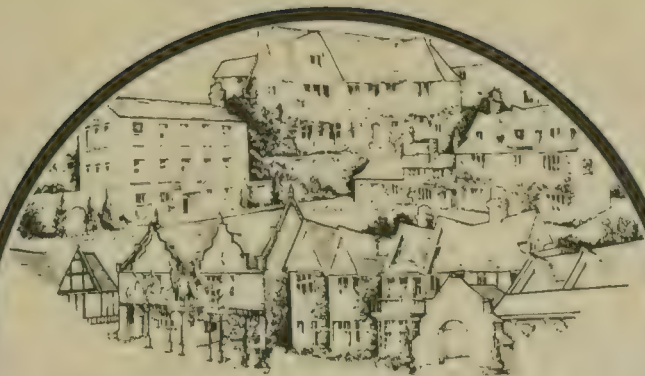
clear that her body is tougher than it appears. She exudes a strong discipline and an ability to interpret rapidly what her coach tells her. I watched her rehearse Balanchine's *Rhapsody* with Bruce Sansom. Her usual partner, Errol Pickford, is injured and the difficult process of adapting to another partner is explored. It's good practice because Sansom is to be her Prince Charming in the *Cinderella* début. Durante is dressed in black leotard and tights; her concession to costume is a white gauzy skirt. As she waits for the session to begin she lifts her leg up almost to her ear. Every movement is examined harshly in front of the mirror: a dancer's life is lived always in reflection.

As Sansom lifts her, she checks in the glass for balance and position. "No", says Sansom, "I'm not pushing you forward enough on the lift." Dance becomes physics. They repeat the movement and the strength needed by the partner to lift the ballerina is emphasised by the sweat on Sansom's body. Although the audience sees the ballerina projected perfectly into space, it is the care of this double work which achieves the final result. The lift is still not to their satisfaction. "I feel as if I'm going down, not up," Durante observes. By now Sansom is soaked through; they've done the lift nine or 10 times. Finally he lifts her so high that she can no longer see herself in the mirrored walls.

Durante is an expressive dancer and has a mobile face. Her smile is fresh and natural; not a feature which dancers find easy. Smiling through pain, tension and exhaustion can easily look forced. Her concentration is 100 per cent; even after a rigorous class, a *Sleeping Beauty* rehearsal and an interview. As for energy, it's high despite only coffee for breakfast, an apple and mineral water for lunch.

In the evening she will go home to her estate agent boyfriend and eat her favourite pasta. The future looks good and she's thinking hard about Juliet. Her parents are being asked to send a video of Franco Zeffirelli's film of *Romeo and Juliet*. The Italian setting obviously appeals to Durante and she wants to know how the Italian director sees Juliet. With star roles awaiting her over the next few years she's all set to be the Royal Ballet's next high-profile ballerina. The company lacks anyone of the creative stature of Ashton or MacMillan to shape the choreography of the 1990s and is looking to its dancers to interpret the great roles in their current repertoire.

The Royal Ballet needs to create its own stars rather than import them from Paris or New York. Over the past few years Gelsey Kirkland and Cynthia Harvey have guested from America. In December, Paris Opéra stars Sylvie Guillem, Laurent Hilaire and Isabelle Guérin will be visiting Covent Garden and showing the standards set by Nureyev's Paris Opéra Ballet. But if the promise already displayed by Durante is fulfilled, the Royal Ballet will be able to point to its own reputation as the generator of star performers. And if Durante's luck, dedication and strength continue to flourish, she may well be the ballerina of the 90s ■



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PEBBLES PARACHUTES AND PUCCINI

At first glance, it is not easy to tell Remo Bertolucci's profession. From his appearance, you'd never realise that his hobbies were parachuting and scuba diving, or that his interests range from nature to Sinatra, Puccini and traditional jazz. But above all Bertolucci has a fascination for natural fashioned rocks; especially pebbles.



What makes him tick? Watches of course. How does he reconcile his interests with the art of designing and supplying watches to a discriminating worldwide clientele? For Bertolucci there is no conflict. He sees an intimate link between the creative process of nature and the creation of timepieces. This is reflected in his trademark, the pebble on which his watches are normally displayed.

Bertolucci explains his fascination with pebbles

and the process of nature thus: "It's true I am a real nature buff. The freedom you feel in the great outdoors. The wonderment when you look at the natural beauty of forms shaped by time. Now take those pebbles. I always marvel at those water worn shapes. I like roundness, flowing lines, I hate skeletal women or angular cars or Giacometti statues." Or, one might add, rectangular watches.

Remo Bertolucci was born in Pia 42 years ago,

the son of a successful grocer. He studied electro mechanical engineering but soon developed a taste for outdoor activities, particularly parachuting. To date he has logged 1500 jumps. He has tried hang gliding and has obtained his pilot's licence; but parachuting still intrigues him. So how did he enter the world of watch making? Fate is the answer. At fourteen his parents took him to Switzerland where he met the daughter of the proprietor of a small watch making

business at Evillard above Biel. They became friends and eventually married. Bertolucci became involved with the business and has successfully developed it over the years. They have two children and Mama Bertolucci keeps her eyes on family and factory while Remo travels the world, developing business opportunities. He has since become a Swiss citizen and regards it as a serious place to work, his ideal homeland.

An individual, Bertolucci is a restless wanderer, he will often steal time to spend alone in hills, desert and mountain between important business meetings. By contrast he may attend a Puccini opera, or a Dixieland jazz band recital. Music is important to him as well. His taste is wide and varied.

He works hard. He is a man of action and admires the same qualities in others. "Whether it's Mikhail Gorbachev or any employees in Evillard." He holds firm opinions and is continuously searching for permanent values. The superficial does not interest him.

Of the future? Bertolucci is optimistic. "A man should never rest on his laurels, you need a challenge in life". He says, "the best thing is to remain confident and rely on your own forces." Such a philosophy is the reason for his success.



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The ILN/Croft Port Christmas Quiz

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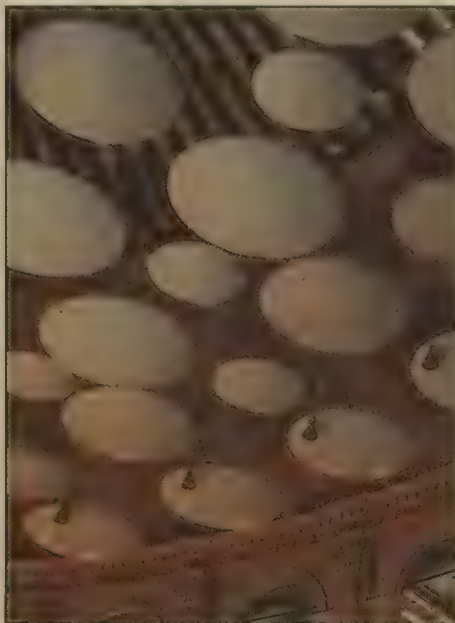
PROGENITORS

Who, or what are or were the parents of the following?

- 1 An elver
- 2 The Black Prince
- 3 A gimmer
- 4 Roo
- 5 The Duchess of Devonshire
- 6 A leveret
- 7 The Duke of Cornwall
- 8 A grilse
- 9 John the Baptist
- 10 Jupiter

SPORTING HEROES 1988

- 1 Which sporting personality gave a Bentley to two policeman, crashed his next car and appeared in plaster after a nightclub brawl?
- 2 Name the "womble" who sunk Liverpool in this year's FA cup.
- 3 Which country bumpkin reached 405 not out—the highest score in English first-class cricket?
- 4 Which odd-job man from Cheltenham soared to success but not victory in Calgary?
- 5 Which athlete said he would like to run for Parliament?
- 6 Who won the Kellogg's Tour of Britain?
- 7 Who won Britain's first gold medal in Seoul?
- 8 Who beat Boris Becker to win the men's singles championships at Wimbledon?
- 9 This year Steffi Graf became the third woman to win the Grand Slam—all four major tennis championships in one calendar year. Name one of the women who preceded her.
- 10 On what horse did Virginia Leng win the Olympic bronze medal in the three-day eventing?



1) In the heady heights are these giant aspirin

IN VINO VERITAS

- 1 Which corpulent imbibor said: "Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy"?
- 2 Which Shakespearean character said about drink: "It provokes the desire but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery"?
- 3 Who wrote: "She looked as though she had been poured into her clothes and had forgotten to say 'when'"?
- 4 Which philosopher said: "Drunkenness is temporary suicide"?
- 5 Who once described himself as "T.T. until prohibition"?

- 6 Who said: "One of the disadvantages of wine is that it makes a man mistake words for thoughts"?

- 7 Who wrote: "It's a naïve Domestic Burgundy without Any Breeding. But I Think You'll Be Amused by Its Presumption"?

- 8 Who wrote: "O for a beaker full of the warm South/Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene"?

- 9 Which lovable rogue said: "If I had a thousand sons, the first principle I would teach them should be, to forswear thin potatoes and to addict themselves to sack"?

- 10 Which drink may light the way to trouble?

BOOKS AND WRITERS

A) *From which works are the following first lines taken?*

- 1 For a long time I used to go to bed early.
- 2 Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong, he was arrested one fine morning.
- 3 All happy families resemble each other. Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.
- 4 All unhappy families resemble each other. Each happy family is happy in its own way.
- 5 Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs.
- 6 It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs and I didn't know what I was doing in New York.
- 7 Half way along the road we have to go/I found myself obscured in a great forest/Bewildered, and I knew I had lost the way.
- 8 When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow.
- 9 There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.

10 Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.

B) *To what or to whom did the following refer?*

1 Jesus wept; _____ smiled. From that divine tear and from that human smile is derived the grace of present civilisation. (Victor Hugo)

a) The Mona Lisa b) Voltaire c) Talleyrand

2 They are so filthy and bestial that no honest man would admit one into his house for a water-closet doormat. (Charles Dickens)

a) Newspapers b) Uncured goatskins c) Dogs

3 It is the only sensual pleasure without vice. (Dr Johnson)

a) Stroking a cat b) Eating kippers c) Music

4 They lead, as a matter of fact, an existence of jumpiness and apprehension.

They sit on the edge of the chair of Literature.

In the House of Life they have the feeling that they have never taken off their overcoats. (Thurber)

a) Humorists b) Journalists c) Poets

5 _____ may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable. (H.L. Mencken)

a) Astrology b) Dieting c) Faith



3) Wynne's fish out of water, but only a walk away



5) Beau Brummell once frequented this fashionable street in the West End, though not as a dealer



2) After the snow, tulips will grow in this West London home to a theatre: there's a restaurant there too

CITIES

A) *In which town or city would you find the following?*

1 Nevsky Prospekt

2 Fisherman's Wharf

3 La Croisette

4 Ramblas

5 Via Veneto

B) *To which arts do the following towns devote their festivals?*

1 Wexford

2 San Sebastian

3 Cheltenham

4 Montreux

5 Aldeburgh

C) *Which artists painted?*

1 Les Demoiselles d'Avignon

2 View of Delft

3 Broadway Boogie-woogie

4 The Resurrection: Cookham

5 Toledo Landscape

D) *Who composed the following?*

1 The Oxford symphony

2 The Prague symphony

3 The Gastein symphony

4 The Leningrad symphony

5 The Dumbarton Oaks concerto?

E) *Where do the following operas take place?*

1 Sadko (Rimsky-Korsakov)

2 L'heure espagnole (Ravel)

3 Madama Butterfly (Puccini)

4 Samson et Dalila (Saint-Saëns)

5 Les vêpres siciliennes (Verdi)



4) Old Father Time here has had a good innings

ORIGINS

1 The town of Nimes in France gave its name to a hard-wearing, twilled fabric. What is it?

2 What origin do the words kedgerie, bungalow, pyjama, gymkhana all have in common?

3 Which area of London is named after the ornamental collars made there in the 17th century by Robert Baker?

4 During the 19th century a cattle rancher in America became known for not branding his beasts. Subsequently his name has been drafted into the language to describe an individual who refuses to conform. What was his name?

5 From which cities does nylon get its name?



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6) He guards the palace without chandellers

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- 1 The Black Stone of Kaaba?
- 2 The city coloured pink?
- 3 The world's oldest walled city?
- 4 An island discovered by the Portuguese in 1500 and given up by the French in 1960?
- 5 The world's smallest independent state?

LONDON

- 1 She once invaded London and is remembered in bronze on Victoria Embankment. Who is she?
- 2 Which was the first London art gallery to open to the public?
- 3 What do the following have in common: Brick, Beauchamp, Bell, Byward, Bowyer, Broad Arrow?
- 4 At what terminus did John Betjeman board the train that "Puffs out of Egloskerry to Tresméer"?
- 5 Which Jermyn Street shop is famous for its perfumes, made to secret recipes?



7) What is heard here is not usually very comic

QUOTATIONS FROM 1988

Who said?

- 1 "I suppose the Prince of Wales feels extra sympathy towards those who have got no job, because in a way *he* has got no job."
- 2 "It is not the creation of wealth which is wrong but the love of money for its own sake."
- 3 "We have to tolerate an incessant menu of utterly gratuitous violence on both cinema and television."
- 4 "The AIDS pandemic is a classic own goal scored by the human race."
- 5 "For seven and a half years, I worked alongside him and I am proud to be his partner. We have made mistakes . . . we have had sex."



8) The Mahatma sits in this West Country square



9) Lying here for many years, Henry V has got the habit, though his original silver head disappeared

DEPARTURES

The following are clues to the identities of five well-known people who have died this year. Can you name them?

- 1 A strict disciplinarian, not unconnected with Psmith.
- 2 Dames bent to his will, but he proved a prickly character in later life.
- 3 Victim of a famous *coup de grâce*, his estate now belongs to a shah.
- 4 An Oxford blue? No, precisely the opposite.
- 5 A down-to-earth man, but with cultivated tastes, sharing much with the Pimpernel.

EMBARRASMENTS

The following have contributed to the embarrassment—financial or otherwise—of five well-known people this year. Who?

- 1 A barmaid in the bedroom
- 2 Agent Paul Vaughan
- 3 Paula Parkinson
- 4 A London club—suitably named for balding gents.
- 5 Futures analyst Joan Quigley

CHRISTMAS

Who is speaking of Christmas in the following quotations?

- 1 "Now one time it comes on Christmas, and in fact it is the evening before Christmas and I am in Good Time Bernstein's little speakeasy in West Forty Seventh Street."
- 2 "Like all intelligent people, I greatly dislike Christmas."
- 3 "I have acquired some nice Christmas loot."

Exquisite gold links from Frank Sinatra, and a lovely black dressing-gown and pyjamas to match from Marlene [Dietrich] and hand-worked slippers from Merle [Oberon] which are charming."

4 "And there dined by my wife's bedside with great content, having a mess of plum porridge and a roasted pullet for dinner and I sent for a mince pie abroad, my wife not being well, to make any herself yet."

5 "Stone and cut raisons in halves, but do not chop them; mask pick and dry the currants and mince the suet finely, cut the candied peel into slices and grate down the bread into fine crumbs."



10) Few passers-by cash-in on the Jubilee Oracle

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**Christmas
Quiz**

ANSWER SHEET

PROGENITORS

- 1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

SPORTING HEROES 88

- 1
2
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4
5
6
7
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10

IN VINO VERITAS

- 1
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10

BOOKS AND WRITERS

- A) 1
2
3
4
5
6
7
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9
10

- B) 1
2
3
4
5

CITIES

- A) 1
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3
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- B) 1
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- C) 1
2
3
4
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- D) 1
2
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4
5

- E) 1
2
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5

ORIGINS

- 1
2
3
4
5

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS?

- 1
2
3
4
5

LONDON

- 1
2
3
4
5

QUOTATIONS FROM 1988

- 1
2
3
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5

DEPARTURES

- 1
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EMBARRASSMENTS

- 1
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CHRISTMAS

- 1
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PICTURE QUIZ

- 1 6
2 7
3 8
4 9
5 10

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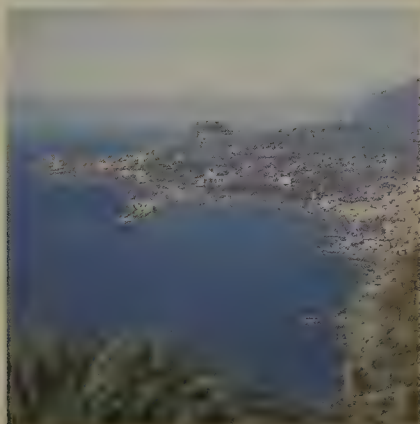


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SENTENCED TO THE SEAS

In May 1987 eight tall ships set sail from England following the course to Australia of the first convict fleet in 1787. On board was a reluctant sailor, Marcus Mainwaring (in the cap) whose literary agent had landed him the role of official chronicler. Given the incentive of meeting with his wife, Rosamund, in ports along the way, he soon found humour on the high seas. But the anxious mariner did not embark without, first, a good deal of persuasion. The following extracts are taken from his log-book Nor Any Drop To Drink



England to Australia, May 1987-January 1988

I felt no apprehension when we set sail from London at 2.30 pm on Monday April 27 1987. The first leg to Portsmouth was to be more of an occasion than an adventure—a mere aperitif. Most of the passengers, or rather trainee crew, were only going on the first leg. A lot of them were businessmen or highly paid professionals who had the money but not the time to go any further. The real voyagers were joining at Portsmouth or Rio. About 10 of us were going the whole way to Sydney, and we had been split up among the various ships

As we passed under Tower Bridge the *Amorina's* masts seemed dangerously close to the walkway that connects the tops of the two towers. She really was a Tall Ship.

The wind was against us so we were under power. A few minutes later the trainee crew started to put up a few token sails to keep the BBC happy, directed by Walther, the first mate.

I stood and watched. This was not out of laziness or fear of becoming horny-handed. Walther had taken me aside earlier. He had explained that since most of this crowd were only going as far as Portsmouth, it would be better if Gordon [an Australian pastry cook] and I kept in the background to let the rest of them have an opportunity to pull a rope or two. After all, we had nearly nine months to learn the ropes. Gordon hadn't understood Walther's eccentric English and was in the midst of the mêlée. It was the first time I had seen him without a cigarette.

It was an entertaining spectacle. About half the trainee crew, having the wherewithal to grease the axle around which the world revolves, owned small yachts, so they thought they knew a bit about sailing. The remainder, like me, were ignorant landlubbers. The zest of the amateur yachtsmen combined with the ignorance of the others was a recipe which did not make a good cocktail. Walther's fractured English was the

Mickey Finn it did not need.

Walther would shout an order to the 40-odd people milling about and mayhem would ensue.

"Ease the bunt lines," Walther shrieked. The landlubbers charged up the deck in one direction and the amateur yachtsmen in the other. The landlubbers, realising that they were going the wrong way, then set off in hot pursuit of those who thought they knew where the bunt lines were. They didn't. It was like watching a rugby match played by the Gadarene swine.

One character, who had been more than usually boastful about his sailing prowess, seized a rope and clung to it possessively. Immediately four others hurled themselves at it. It was lucky they all had potbellies. They bounced off each other.

Walther then made a mistake. He had obviously forgotten that this mob, and that is exactly what they were by now, had paid real money for the privilege of pulling a few ropes on this jaunt down the English Channel.

"Zese are ze bunt lines," he shouted above the uproar, and placed himself in front of them. He disappeared under about 140 stone of expense-account lard. Some of them, in their eagerness to get a hand round a rope, were now climbing up and over the backs of the others. It reminded me of the Eton Wall Game. All I could see of Walther was one foot protruding from under a wobbling pyramid that heaved and grunted. After five minutes of this, half of them dropped out to give their pacemakers a chance to cool down.



I settled down in the bar with Walther—Valter, as he pronounced it—Jack [hotel owner from Folkestone and keen yachtsman], and a mixed bag of Australians and Americans. The Americans, I noticed, had brought their own whisky.

Walther was exercising his ecological conscience. He had, as I had already discovered, a political conscience, a social conscience, and an environmental conscience as well. I don't know where he found room for them all.

"Sailing once, I met zis vale . . ."

"Whale."

"Ya, a vale, It vas ze most—how you say it—it vas ze most moving, emotional moment of my life. It vas besides ze ship. I looked down upon it."

"What did God say to the aborigines?"

"I looked down at zis vale. Ze vale looked back. Ze vale looked deep in mine eyes."

"Don't do anything till I get back."

"And this vale knew. Ze vale knew."

"What did ze vale know, Walther?"

Walther's eyes were wild. For a moment I thought he'd taken offence at my flippant parody of his accent.

"Ze vale knew," shrieked Walther, and paused for dramatic effect. The Americans started edging away.

"Ze vale knew," he said, lowering his voice, "dat he had made ze right decision. Oh ya." The Americans fled.

"How—cough—do you rate—cough—Maggie's—cough—chances—Marcough?" asked Jack.

"Decision?"

"Ya. Decision. Ze vale knew dat ze great-grandfathers of his origins had made ze wise decision."

"You'd better humour him," said Jack out of the corner of his mouth.

"Vat is dat?"

"Very interesting, Walther. But we don't quite follow your drift . . ."

"Vales are mammals. Ya. So are dolphins and porpoi. Vell, millions of years behind us, zey haf a choice—to live on ze land or to live in ze seas and ve choose ze land. Evolution. Ve haf evolved hands. Hands."



Amorina, the ship on which Marcus Mainwaring sailed and suffered on the long, hard voyage to Sydney

Walther waved his hands. Jack bit through the end of his cigar and swallowed it.

"Ya! Hands vith vich to smoke ze cancer sticks. Hands vith vich to count ze money. Hands vich commit all manner of evils. Ze vale, he choose the purity of ze sea. Ze vale knew dat ze land would lead to ze weeping and ze gnashing of teeth."

"He eschewed the vale of tears, eh Walther?" I said. Jack was looking at his hands, aghast.

"Chewed? Ze vale chews nothing. Ze vale filters his food. Ze vale lives in brotherhood. Ze vale . . ."



I woke early but still missed breakfast. I got no sympathy, but managed to extract half a cup of

tepid coffee from the pump thermos. I took it up on deck, saw Portsmouth and immediately retreated to the other side of the ship. I leant against the cold metal wall of the galley and contemplated the chilly waters of the harbour. Muffled snores rose from the *Trade Wind*. They were at peace. I began to relax.

Suddenly a pair of feet interposed themselves between my eyeballs and the horizon. *Bare feet*. Feet that were horrible to look upon. Feet that resembled some rare species of reptilia that lurks in the primal slime of an Amazonian creek—yet recognisably human feet, battered splayed and corunculated from an excess of jogging and other athletic pursuits.

I regarded them with a mixture of horror and distaste. Was I hallucinating? Was this the first sign of what my doctor had been gloomily

prognosticating for some years now? I'd been told one first saw squirrels running up the wall. Feet would be a new one for the textbooks. Either way, they upset me. I was just about to test the veracity of their existence by prodding them with my cigarette, when they abruptly disappeared. The tall, stringy fellow appeared, sliding hand over hand down a rope. He looked as though he had spent the night in the rigging.

We stared at each other with mutual hostility and then he loped off. To be confined on a 120-foot ship with such a person or even a portion of his anatomy would severely test my powers of endurance. I expect to see feet when I'm lying in the gutter singing but not when I'm upright and sober. What if more people like him were on board or joined the ship at a later stage?

I remembered that on the original voyage, John Power, one of the convicts, had escaped at Tenerife by shinning down the anchor chain and stealing a dinghy. He had rowed to a small island but had been recaptured the next morning. He had made the mistake of falling asleep on the beach. I resolved to give it a try as far as Tenerife. If I had any more trouble with feet I could follow Power's example and get a cheap flight home.

After this harrowing episode I felt I could contemplate Portsmouth with equanimity so I moved across the deck to watch out for Mark [Marcus's literary agent]. He was due at nine o'clock. At 9.30 there was still no sign of him. The fleet was supposed to leave at 11 to anchor for the night off the Isle of Wight before actually setting sail the next day. Then there would be the final send off with the Red Arrows giving an aerobatic display and the Queen sailing past to inspect the fleet. I was fed up with all this shilly-shallying. Why couldn't they get going? It was like hanging about in a dentist's waiting-room. Still, I shouldn't grumble. The original fleet was delayed four months by adverse winds, supply problems and bureaucratic inertia

A few minutes later I spotted Mark's Saab edging along the quayside, its sleek lines marred by a peculiar contraption on the roof.

"What's with the ladder trick?" I asked anxiously, as we shook hands.

"Ladder rack? Oh that! It's a ski rack."

I sighed with relief. I note little details like that and imbue them with a greater significance than they warrant. I didn't want to end up in the middle of the Atlantic without a literary agent if Mark suddenly found window-cleaning more remunerative.

By now I was suffering from a crisis of confidence.

"What am I going to write about? What if nothing happens?"

"Something will," said Mark ominously. "Anyway, you're bound to meet some



Walther the Swede, first mate and whale watcher

interesting characters."

Adriaan limped by. His eyes were double-glazed. Mark winced.

"I have already. It's not them I'm worried about. There's this horribly jolly crowd on the *Amorina*. You know—the type that loves playing Hunt the Slipper. They've already started singing 'My Bonny lies over the Ocean'. They'll drive me mad. They like everything—even macaroni cheese. I think they've escaped from the set of *Blue Peter*. They're all so friendly. What if there's no friction?"

"There will be with you on board," said Mark reassuringly.

I felt irritated. I get fed up feeding him lines. I changed my approach.

"Walther said I might see a whale."

"A pink one, the way you're going on. You'll end up in a park nursing a bottle of cider." I ignored this and reverted to my whingeing pom role.

"I'll go nuts in a confined space with that crowd. Sartre says that hell is other people. He demonstrates this brilliantly in his play *In Camera*." I paused. Mark was looking worried. Perhaps now I'd get some sympathy.

"I hope you're not going to carry on like that in the book."

"Why not?"

"It's too intellectual. Publishers don't like it."

"You know I hate pleasant, well-integrated people. I was quite happy in London with a close circle of friends."

I looked at him. He looked away and started studying his fingernails. He was obviously thinking about the times I'd disgraced myself in restaurants.

"You're trying to get rid of me." I whined. "Nine months. What are you doing to me?"

"More, if you decide to take a look around Australia," Mark smiled to himself.

Now I knew how the original convicts felt.

"Hadn't you better spend half an hour with Rosamund? She's bringing the typewriter I promised you."

"Excellent. You managed to get that Rank Xerox 575 Compact Electric with the 255-character correction memory. Only 10 kilos. 'There it is now.'" Rosamund appeared, struggling across the quayside.

"Will all trainee crew board ship. Will all trainee crew board ship."

"What?" I said. "It's only 20 to 11." But they needed 20 minutes to haul up the gang-plank and throw off the ropes. Luckily, Rosamund and I had said our goodbyes in London. I hate public displays of emotion. I stepped towards her and relieved her of her burden. Then we embraced. I pushed back her hair and whispered in her ear. What I said is strictly private and is reserved for my accountant and Her Majesty's Inspector of Taxes.



Day by day the weather improved as we sailed southwards down the coast of Portugal. This meant deck work and my first encounter with Dan the ubiquitous bosun.

I was on the boat deck trying to coil a rope. It was a stubborn one with a kink in it. Every time I attempted to untwist the kink, it would reappear six inches away. I soon lost my temper. I dropped the rope and put the boot in.

"That's no way to treat a rope," said a quiet voice behind me. I turned to tell whoever it was to go dance in cod shit. I didn't. Dan was tall, thin and wiry. He had a presence that commanded respect.

"That rope looks like a snake's honeymoon," he observed.

"That rope's a bugger," I said.

Dan took the rope. He twisted his wrists. The rope relaxed. Then he fed it through his hands and poured it on the deck to form a perfect coil. The rope lay there as still and smug as an ammonite. When Dan had gone I gave it another kick.

My next encounter with him taught me a lot. It was a fresh, clear morning. I was on lookout. I was lying in a huge coil of mooring rope, smoking a cigarette and contemplating the blue "inverted bowl we call the sky, whereunder crawling coop't we live and die".

A shadow fell across me.

"Are you on lookout?" asked Dan.

"Yup."

"You're not going to spot anything looking at the sky."

"I'm not going to spot anything looking at the sea. Anyway I had a look around about 10 minutes ago. Three hundred and sixty degrees of nothing."

"Get up." He said it quietly, almost sadly.

I struggled to my feet, dropping the cigarette into the coil. Dan extracted it with distaste and flicked it into the sea.

"Hey! I hadn't finished it—Jesus Christ!

Where did that come from?"

Less than half a mile away a colossal container ship was steaming northwards.

"That came from the horizon."

"But there wasn't a sign of it 10 minutes ago."

"It's doing about 20 knots. The *Amorina* may have been in the trough of the swell when you looked. How carefully *did* you look? You might have spotted a smudge on the horizon. They saw it in the wheelhouse 15 minutes ago. What if it had been coming astern?"

"But they've got eyes as well. And radar."

"There are other people in the world like you. Do you think they spend the whole time on the bridge glued to the radar? They're probably smoking and playing cards. One of those bastards arrived in port with a yacht wrapped round its bows and they didn't even know it."

Dan had the knack of being crushing without being offensive.

"Being on watch is an important and responsible duty. There's a lot to look out for apart from ships."

"Such as?"

"A squall, for example. Look over there." Dan pointed to the west. The sea stretched away in a series of monotonous undulations. Grey clouds were building up on the horizon.

"Well?"

"There's nothing to report at the moment. But let's say you saw a patch of sea out there where the waves had white crests. And let's say that this patch of sea was moving towards us. That would be a sign of an approaching squall. It could hit us abeam in minutes. It would be helpful if the helmsman were warned. And there are other things to look out for. Somebody spotted a fishing net afloat yesterday."

"So what? Ramming one of those isn't going to sink the ship."

"No. But it could indicate that there were trawlers in the vicinity. Report everything you see. It could provide valuable information. Even debris."

"Debris?"

"Yes. There could be somebody clinging to it. Lots of small yachts sail down to Gibraltar and Tenerife. Sometimes they get into trouble. How would you feel if you were hanging on to a plank and a ship sailed by because some goon was in a trance?"

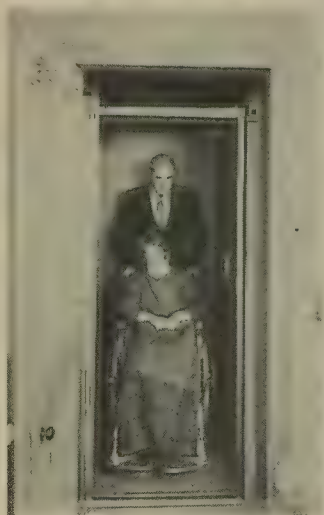
I got the point. I resolved to mend my ways.

The next day on lookout I performed my duties conscientiously. I scanned the horizon, studied the surface of the sea and strained my eyes looking for debris with men clinging to it.

The weather was unsettled and blustery. Cones of sunlight, like inverted searchlights, poured gold on the waters. Squadrons of clouds passed above us and raced ahead southwards. Darker clouds, low on the horizon, kept pace with us as they shed their burden.

Then I saw something to starboard and slightly astern. Two water spouts, elemental monsters from out of the grey wilderness of the Atlantic, were stalking the ship. Their swirling

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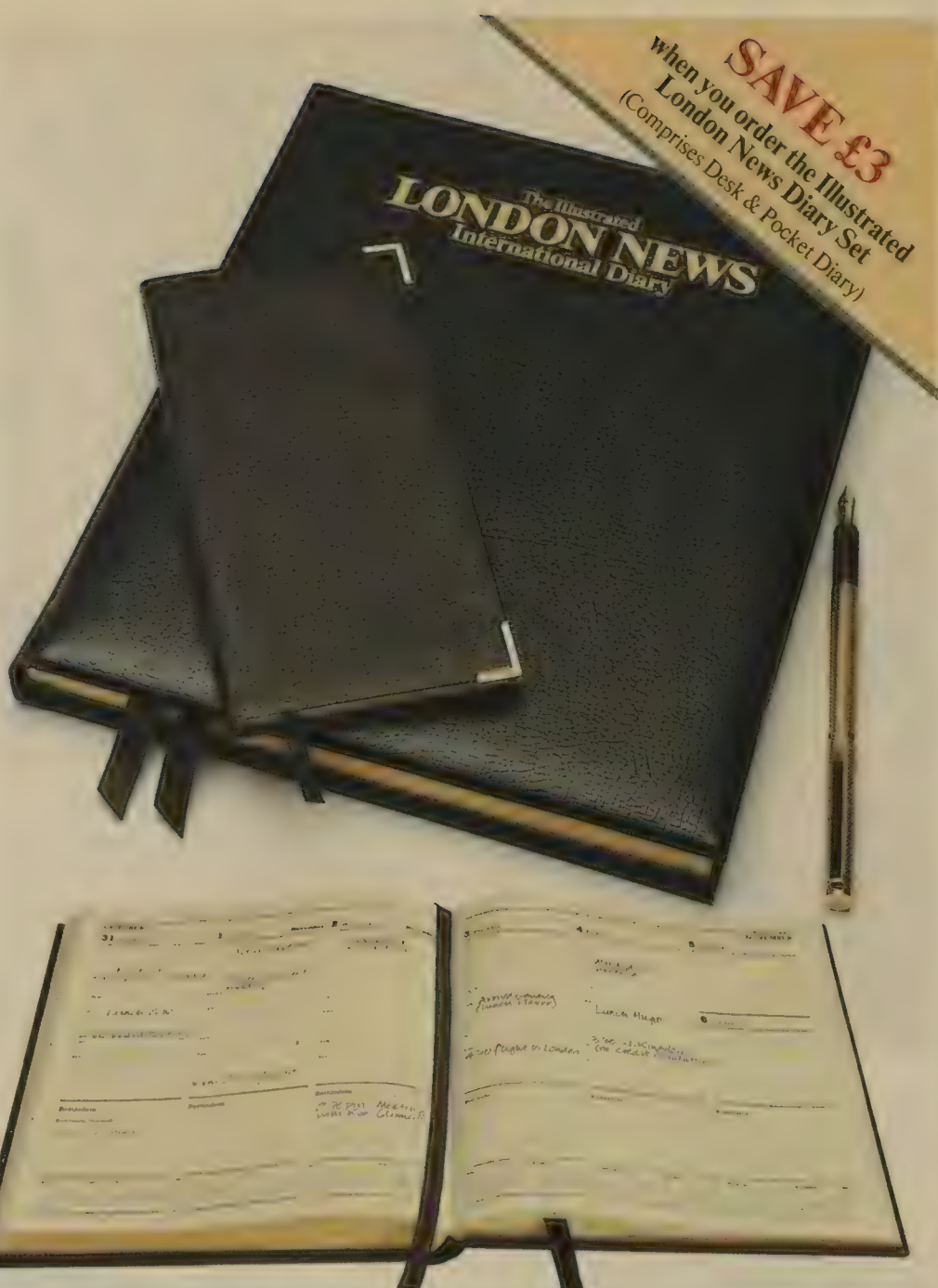
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ILN13

skirts tapered away into surrealistically elongated waists so that they resembled gaunt Dalinian cooling towers. Giants with their heads wrapped in the clouds, they groped and reeled along the horizon on a parallel course.

"Water spouts!" I shouted. A group of zombies sat on the deck sewing a sail, their faces frozen in imbecilic rapture.

"Water spouts!" I shouted to those on the deck below. They were staring blindly at the sea, following their own internal dreams.

There was a stampede as everyone charged below to fetch their cameras. Dan strode up to me.

"I saw them first," I said proudly.

"Why didn't you tell them in the wheelhouse?"

"I...er... Oh dear."

"All you had to do was shout down this," said Dan tapping the mouthpiece of the speaking tube. I'd been using it as an ashtray. Somebody must have been walking around with an earful of ash.

"Those things are bad news. They could turn us over. We'd be lucky to get away with just the masts ripped off. They're unpredictable. They could veer towards us any minute." Dan and I watched them for a few moments. Then they peeled away and disappeared. Dan looked at me, sighed and shook his head. He started to walk away.

"Hey, Dan," I called. He turned and I pointed to the west.

Another water spout was struggling into existence. Hundreds of feet tall, like a blind worm it probed the sky. Then it tottered and collapsed. Dan walked away.



Gordon had been to see that other great attraction of Rio, Ronnie Biggs, and had put us in touch with him.

We'd [Marcus and Rosamund] arranged to meet Mr Biggs at 11.30 by the dock gates. By noon I'd used up my limited reserves of patience. The sun beat down and bounced off the tar. A humid wind played with dust and litter. The air was acrid with exhaust fumes. The dock guards looked at us suspiciously.

"What's the time?"

"You asked me that a minute ago. Why don't you wear your watch?"

"It's at the bottom of the Atlantic. Got scraped off by a rope. I'll give the bugger another 10 minutes. Then I'm off."

"Is this him?" Rosamund asked. A big man in a silver grey suit emerged from a taxi.

"No, I'll recognise him immediately. Where the hell is he?"

"Gordon told you he'd be late. He didn't turn up at all the first time he'd arranged to meet him."

"He manages to catch trains on time. What's the... there he is."

Biggs signalled the taxi driver to wait. He was a big man, over six foot. He approached. I



With Mr Biggs: "Had my face re-arranged in 65"

stepped towards him. He started to swerve around me. I intercepted and introduced myself. We shook hands with a distinct lack of warmth. He cheered up a bit when I introduced Rosamund.

"You didn't look like a writer," he said as we got in the taxi. What the hell did he expect, I wondered—somebody with a quill behind his ear wearing a cloak and sitting on a portable tombstone like Richard Le Gallienne.

"But I do now," I said, "on closer inspection."

He turned and laughed. "Sorry I'm late, I've lost me bird."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Rosamund said.

"That parrot cost me a lot. By the way, taken the liberty of booking a table at a seafood restaurant I know. OK with you?" It was OK with us. The restaurant was a tall octagonal building near the waterfront.

"Used to be a fish market," Biggs explained.

The foyer could have been in a traditional London club. Two venerable old men with ferocious white moustaches sat on a sofa, their hands resting on silver-handled walking sticks. A lift the size of a sentry box transported us to the dining-room.

"A bit posh," Biggs said, "but the nosh's all right."

We were shown a table with a view of the sea. We ordered a bottle of wine to be going on with. Biggs's eyes raked the room. Habit, I supposed. He looked at me over the menu. He had a disconcerting, penetrating stare accentuated by the way his eyelids puckered in the corners....

"You've had a remarkable run of luck," I said.

"Yeah. Luck and this," he said tapping the side of his head. "Luck in Australia. They were on to me but some daft policeman leaves a file open on his desk. A journalist sees it and it's in the news. Mate of mine phones me up at work and I'm off. Just had time to get home, pick up a few things and say bye bye to Charmian. A few hours later there's a regiment outside the house. They'd known where I was for more than 24 hours. Then they guard the airports. They'd forgotten about ships. I took a slow boat to Panama. What a bunch. When I think back on it now I could've got away with it if I'd just moved

a couple of blocks up the road. Still, here I am and here I'll stay."....

The wine flowed. Ronnie became expansive.

"They've tried to get me out of Brazil three times. Poor old Slipper. I almost felt sorry for him when I saw the picture of him on the plane home sitting by the empty seat where I should've been. And then these fellows tried to kidnap me. Ex-Scots Guards. Big lads, they were. Tried to jump me in the foyer of a nightclub. One got me from behind. Elbowed him in the guts and over the top with him."

"You're looking fit and well," I said.

"Had my face re-arranged in Paris in 65. Funny thing plastic surgery. As you grow older you start to look more and more like yourself when you were young. Still, I don't have to hide any more."

It was nearly four o'clock when we left. There were a lot of empty wine bottles on the table. He invited us back for a few jugs at his place. We took a taxi to Santa Teresa, a quaint old residential district on a hillside—the Hampstead of Rio. We stopped off at his local to get supplies. It was a cross between a grocery store and a bar. Everyone seemed to know him. We had a few beers before setting off up the hill with clinking bags.

"Wanted to walk the last bit," he said. "Bloody parrot flew away this morning. Never goes far. No sense of direction. Can't find its way back."

Halfway up the hill he spotted it. A large red, green and blue bird cavorted in the upper branches of a tree in some wasteground between two houses.

"We'll never get up there," he said. He threw a small stone into the tree. I picked up half a cobble and hurled it. It passed through the foliage with great velocity. A few leaves spiralled down. Then there was a series of sharp cracks as it bounced along the roof tiles of the house behind.

"Christ Almighty, you'll get me arrested." We scuttled up the road. We met a slim youth. Ronnie spoke to him in Portuguese.

"He'll get it," he said. The youth climbed over the wall.

The Biggs's residence, on a steep slope, looked out over red-tiled roofs and the haze-shrouded city. It was a pleasant, lived-in house, built some time in the last century, retaining many original features—walls, window frames, floorboards and the like. A swimming pool gaped in the spacious terrace. It was empty except for a crisp carpet of leaves in the deep end.

"Hockney'd have trouble painting this one," I said.

"It doesn't need painting," Ronnie said. "Does it?"

The slim youth appeared at the gate at the top of a steep flight of steps. He bore the multi-hued parrot. It gave me a headache just to look at it. Even nature, it seems, suffers occasional lapses in taste. Ronnie was delighted. He counted out a few sheets in gratitude. The parrot clambered along his shoulders, plucking at his grey curls.

He passed it to his son Michael, a dark, handsome, precocious youth.

"What's your favourite group then, Grandad?" he asked me.

"The Sex Pistols and the Amadeus Quartet." He looked puzzled. "I don't like the wishy-washy middle-of-the-road stuff," I explained. "You know—Cliff Richard and Led Zeppelin."

"Never heard of the Amadeus bunch," he said.

"Real shockers," I said.

"Stop taking the piss," Ronnie said. "Let's go and shoot a few frames."

Michael dragged Rosamund off to the lounge to watch a video-shocker, *Dead-end Drive-in* or something like that. I caught the odd glimpse of it on journeys to the fridge. It started with some soft porn and then plunged into the main theme—gangs of Australian youths kicking orientals to death. It was either so badly made or so surrealistically ambiguous we couldn't make out whether it was a celebration of white supremacy or an indictment of colour prejudice.

Two ranks of gold discs lined one wall of the pool room. Ronnie pointed at them with a pool cue.

"Michael was a pre-teen pop star. They go in for them in a big way here. I'm well pleased with him. I think he's going to retire soon."

After four games it was two all. Our shots were becoming more and more erratic. It wasn't a question of skill but who could hold their drink best. We were about equal on both counts. We agreed to call it a day. He was due at the film studio at 11 pm. He was starring with Steven Berkoff in *Prisoner of Rio*. He thought he'd "better 'ave a bit of a nod first".



Sailing to Tristan da Cunha was to prove the most exhausting part of the whole voyage. The swell had been building up steadily. Eventually it reached a height of 30 feet from trough to crest. It was relentless. It was mesmerising. It went on 24 hours a day for nine days. Rampart after heaving grey rampart swept across the ocean. No sooner had the *Amorina* dropped into a trough than she would start to climb the glacis of the next looming escarpment. She would tilt sickeningly as the slope steepened; sink deep into the convex brow until the sea sluiced along the deck; rise and stagger across the crest, the masts describing huge arcs in the sky; totter on the edge of the opposite slope before slithering down into the following trough. Sometimes the bowsprit bored into the side of the swell. Then the sea would burst over the prow in a white explosion and pour along the deck in a dark emerald torrent veined with bubbling grey tentacles of foam. Sometimes a rogue wave crashed into the side and flung a semi-translucent vault over the boat deck to drench those sheltering in its lee....

On August 22 the midnight watch heard over the ship's radio the tragic news that somebody on the *Anna Kristina* had fallen overboard. The *Trade Wind*, *Tucker Thompson* and *Soren*

Larsen had converged with the *Anna Kristina* to search the area. We were too far south to join them. The next day we learnt it was Henrik. The search had been called off.

I don't like writing about things I haven't witnessed but this sad event calls for more than a bald statement of fact. When I rejoined the *Anna Kristina* for a final leg from Fremantle to Sydney, John, the Captain, solved my dilemma. He gave me permission to print his account of Henrik's death which he'd written for the Court of Inquiry....

Anna Kristina, 23.08.87

The Circumstances of the Death of Henrik Bak Nielsen

During the night watch 00-44 22.08, of which Henrik was the watch leader, an attempt was made to set the 'lee sail' as an outer jib. Henrik was leading the work. Abigail Heath and Ricardo B. Neto participated and Suzanne Phillips was at the helm.

The weather: NE 5/5, overcast, moderate visibility, the ship's course was 140° true.

Whilst the sail was being hoisted, Henrik was leaning over the side to gather the violently flapping sheets in order to make fast the pinrail. The ship heeled and Henrik was pulled over the side.

This happened at approximately 01.05 hours and the ship was doing five knots. Henrik, still holding the sheet, was dragged alongside some seconds.

I was woken by the helmsman and managed to get on the deck before Henrik let go. The rudder was put hard into the wind, both the life buoys were thrown and one of the lights was seen flickering shortly after.

By this time more people were on deck. I asked Salo van de Vooren to pull in the log line. Henrik was holding on to it but let go after some seconds.

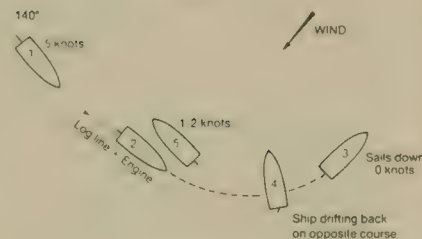
The sails came down, and I called PANPAN on the VHF, noted the position (31°21'S 15°52'W) according to the Sat Nav, and that last fix was two hours old.

The *Trade Wind* answered my PANPAN, they were approximately seven miles to the leeward side—time 01.10 hours.



Sydney harbour when the tall ships fleet arrived

MANOEUVRE.



1) Sails flown: mizzen, main, stay sail, inner jib

The ship came around to the opposite course with the engine on slow speed and the aldis and masthead light on as search lights. Henrik was suddenly observed at the port quarter 10 metres away.

Johan Brox instantly took a coil of rope from the pinrail and dived into the water in Henrik's direction. At the same time I gave full throttle astern but had to give up because Johan was just astern. At this time Henrik was out of sight.

When we saw him, he was without a life buoy and was screaming in panic and flapping his arms, his voice was full of water.

The rudder, at the same time as Johan was pulled back on board, was put hard to starboard and the engine on full throttle ahead.

I turned the ship so that the wind was on the beam and continued to turn to go down wind to the position where Henrik was last seen.

Henrik was not sighted after this but some believe they heard him....

The search continued all day with the participation of all four ships and covered all down to 12 miles lee of the incident position. Much was observed but no Henrik or life buoys were seen.

Half an hour after sunset the search was called off; this was a decision agreed upon by all the ships' Captains.

Henrik had by this time been in the water for 18 hours; his clothing consisted of jeans, rubber boots, sweater and anorak. The water temperature was 14°C.

The information given in this report, compiled by Captain John Sorensen, has been fully confirmed by the entire ship's company on the *Anna Kristina*.

Captain John Sorensen

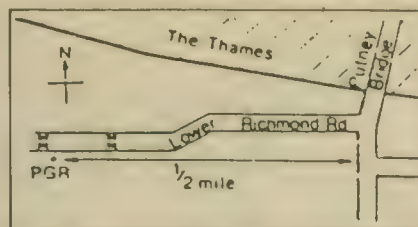
Johan Brox
Witness

Henrik's death made us realise that this was not simply a re-enactment voyage; a sort of maritime history play performed for the most part to a largely indifferent and invisible audience. Apart from the welcomes and send-offs we enjoyed at each port, we were on our own in the middle of the ocean with all the attendant dangers. The sea, the waves and the wind were real. The ship was not a stage and we were not actors. We were sailing on a voyage in its own right ■

Nor Any Drop To Drink is published by Bloomsbury Publishing Limited on November 3, £14.95.

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ILN 1.

GOOD READS

With so many books stacked on to the shelves at this time of year, choosing one can be tricky. To make it easier Ian Thomson selects a stockingful of the best

The Letters of T. S. Eliot: Vol 1: 1898-1922

Edited by Valerie Eliot
Faber & Faber, £25

W. H. Auden once wrote this palindrome: "T. Eliot, top bard, notes putrid tang emanating: 'I sign it a name: gnat dirt upset on drab pot toilet'."

To judge by this and the eagerly-awaited *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, the top bard had a notable taste for putrid tangs. In a letter to Eliot dated December 24, 1921, Ezra Pound parodies *The Wasteland*, remarking on its "odour of putrefaction", its "smell without attraction". These letters are not all a pleasant read. Covering the period from the poet's childhood in St Louis, Missouri, to the end of 1922—the year of *The Wasteland*—this first volume grimly documents the mental collapse which eventually put Eliot's first wife Vivienne in a mental hospital. Whatever the reasons for Vivienne's catastrophic state of health, Eliot wrote of her without much affection, enumerating her ailments with the calm detachment of a mathematician solving an algebraic equation. On two occasions Vivienne is referred to simply as "the sick woman". The letters concerning Eliot's own breakdown, when a nerve specialist advised him to quit his job in the foreign department of Lloyds Bank and take the air at Margate, are equally bleak. They chart the emotional unrest which was to culminate in the composition of *The Wasteland*.

All is not so grim however. From Ezra Pound there is much rumbustious correspondence, most of it bouncing between successive

editions of his vorticist magazine *Blast!* It is often amusing, as in Pound's cantankerous comment to Eliot on receipt of a first draft of *The Wasteland*: "Complimenti, you bitch. I am wracked by the seven jealousies." And one is just as surprised to find the presumably pinstriped Eliot, future poetry editor at Faber & Faber, concluding a letter to Ezra with a formal: "Good fucking, brother." Perhaps the strain of working at the bank was beginning to tell on TS.

We are fortunate that Eliot was not in the habit—as was W. H. Auden—of throwing away letters once they had been answered. The poet's widow Valerie, who is sole trustee of the Eliot estate, has assembled her material from archives and private sources the world over, and all credit must go to her for so diligent a feat of editorship. Nevertheless, it is strange that it has taken so long to publish this first volume of Eliot's correspondence: the poet died nearly a quarter of a century ago. And it is by no means certain how much original material has been withheld.

In Search of J. D. Salinger

By Ian Hamilton
Heinemann, £12.95

The business of literary executorship, of judging when a writer's private manuscripts should become public property, is the subject of Ian Hamilton's entertaining *In Search of J. D. Salinger*. As a biography of Salinger, author of that bible of American counter-culture *The Catcher in the Rye*, Hamilton's book must be deemed a failure.



*We all know
about his
limericks but
as an
illustrative
draughtsman
Lear was just
as brilliant.
His Levantine
drawings
are a delight*

Painting: Edward Lear's
Constantinople

It had to be. Since 1965 J. D. Salinger has been underground, famous for not wanting to be famous, a Greta Garbo of American letters. Not surprisingly, Hamilton (in Salinger's opinion a "snooper and a thief") was hindered at every turn; in a court of law he was denied the right to paraphrase from Salinger's letters.

What Hamilton does is to turn his biography into a literary detective story, creating two biographical selves: the one a com-
plaisant scholar who respectfully observes Salinger's right to privacy; and the other a sleuthing *alter ego* who gumshoes about with a gung-ho disrespect for the proprieties of literary biography. Throughout his book Hamilton plays these warring selves against each other to comic effect. But what adds so much spice to the investigations is the suspicion that Salinger, mysterious exponent of outsiderism and at the same time metropolitan wise-guy, is simply playing an elaborate game of hide-and-seek. The great S. J. Perelman once said that Salinger "may be a recluse but I'll bet he goes down to the mailbox just as fast as everybody else".

Life—classic photographs

A personal interpretation:
John Loengard
Thames & Hudson, £15.95
Published on November 14

Of all the American newspapers and magazines it was *Life* that tried hardest to track down the elusive Salinger. The best it could muster were a few born-of-desperation photographs: among them Salinger's mailbox and a picture with the chirpy caption: "the family dog taking an un-Salingerlike peek at passers-by!" These must rank among the magazine's most egregious photographic failures, but fortunately are not contained within one of this year's most outstanding picture collections.

Taken from the 2,000 issues of the magazine published so far, many of the pictures are so famous they have entered the 20th century as history. They record incidents both horrific and poignant. There is Margaret Bourke-White's picture of inmates in the Buchenwald death-camp, one of the first

photographs to confirm the impossible reality of Hitler's final solution. Among the more famous of Robert Capa's war photographs are his shots of marines wading through the waters of Normandy on D-Day.

The Lost Father

By Marina Warner
Chatto & Windus, £11.95

One of the best novels published this year is Marina Warner's *The Lost Father*, set in southern Italy (reviewed *ILN*, November). The descriptions of the parched and lunar landscape—"harsh white with limestone shining in the sun"—of Italy's primitive Mezzogiorno, of a Europe modern only to a degree, are so exquisite and sensual they approach poetry. We are given a celestial kaleidoscope of colours, hothouse smells and sounds—the veined purple onion, the fruity, ruby red of wine, the air which hums with the "gorged drowsiness of flies".

The starting-point for *The Lost Father* is in fact contemporary England. When not gathering and cataloguing ephemera for the archives of a dilapidated London museum, the narrator, Anna, is composing an imaginary memoir of her Italian mother. Anna's investigations take her back in time to the first third of this century, where we meet Davide Pittagora, her grandfather. It is not entirely clear whether this mysterious man died as the result of lead-poisoning from a bullet fired during a duel—or whether he is descended from Pythagoras. Mysteries remain, and it is Anna's task, in the writing of her memoir, to sift fact from fiction.

The Last Leopard

By David Gilmour
Quartet, £15.95
Published on November 24

If one thinks of the popularity of Visconti's film version of Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, with which Marina Warner's novel is supposed—according to her publishers—to have a good deal in common, it is strange that a biography of di Lampedusa (1896-1957) has taken so long to appear in England. David Gilmour's *The Last Leopard* is a triumph of

scholarship and very fine writing.

While researching his biography, Gilmour had the good fortune to secure the co-operation of di Lampedusa's adopted son, Gioacchino. With his guidance, Gilmour unearthed an old cardboard box it had remained unopened since 1957—containing unpublished essays, several photograph albums and diaries from the last years of di Lampedusa's life. Gilmour makes good use of this material: from out of the welter of sometimes conflicting information we learn of one or two interesting facts. During the First World War, for instance, the writer-prince was spared execution at the hands of the Austrians only because of a ducal coronet which the riflemen discovered sewn on to his shirt. It could almost be a scene from *The Leopard*.

Giuseppe di Lampedusa was possessed of phenomenal erudition: he was one of the first Italians to penetrate fully the mysteries of James Joyce. According to *The Last Leopard*, he regarded Graham Greene as not only the greatest modern writer after T. S. Eliot but also one of the most original of Catholic thinkers: "It is very unlikely," he once said, "that Greene will ever become Pope. But if he does, we will all become Catholics with him."

The Captain and the Enemy

By Graham Greene
Reinhardt, £10.95

Graham Greene is our best living writer not to have won the Nobel Prize. It is good, then, to see that there is writer's blood in the old man yet, that he is on first-rate form. Greene's latest and 25th novel, *The Captain and the Enemy*, is one of the most entertaining pieces of fiction published this year.

From the first, we are in familiar Greenland: a drab and derelict pre-war England of the Depression years. *Tarzan's Daughter* is showing at the local cinema and policemen still address women, unbelievably, as "ma'am". But since this is Graham Greene, all is not so innocent. A clue to what he is about is given in the George A. Birmingham quotation on the title-page: "Will you be sure to know the good side from the bad, the Captain from the enemy?" And so we are

introduced to Greene's eternal themes of betrayal and moral dubiety, to a world in which the goodies turn out to be the baddies, and the underdog the best man.

This novella is in two parts: the first is set in London's seedy bedsit land, the second in Greene's beloved Panama—vultures, slums, Sandinistas, gun-runners and dodgy CIA men. The Captain of the title—a shady hybrid of Long John Silver, Fagin, Captain Grimes and either Burke or Hare—is one of Greene's most memorable inventions, and it was sad to hear the writer threatening in a recent interview that *The Captain and the Enemy* would be his last book.

UTZ

By Bruce Chatwin
Jonathan Cape, £9.95

Bruce Chatwin's prose is honed to perfection. To take a quote from the first page of *UTZ*: "In a garden across the street, jackdaws with twigs in their beaks were wheeling above lindens, and now and then a minor avalanche would slide from the pantiled roof of a tenement." Crisp and precise, the Chatwin sentence is brittle in construction, fine as a Fabergé egg.

The story is set mainly in Prague. Kaspar Joachim Utz is the owner of a spectacular collection of Meissen porcelain which has survived the Second World War and the years of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia. Being one-quarter Jewish and ever fearful for his life, Utz's affection for his collection is such that compared to it "the Gestapo, the Secret Police and other hooli-



Graham Greene: on first-rate form



gans were creatures of tinsel".

The narrator of *UTZ*, an Englishman who is sent to Prague to write for a learned journal an article about the Emperor Rudolf II's compulsive collecting of exotica, meets Utz one year before the Soviet tanks were to overrun the city in the spring of 1968. During their conversations, Utz makes much of the ancient Jewish legends of the golem.

On returning to Prague the following year, the narrator does not know that Utz has died—nobody knows how—during the riots. When he finds out he searches high and low for his dead friend's collection of porcelain, but it is nowhere to be found. The suspicion is that the Meissen figurines have themselves been possessed of the golem spirit and have wandered off, thus avoiding the fate of ending up on the shelves of a Soviet art gallery. *UTZ* is a peculiar book and the points it makes are erudite: it is a novel for those of mandarin or specialist tastes. Perhaps it is worth remembering that Chatwin was once resident Impressionist expert at Sotheby's.

The Tongue Set Free

By Elias Canetti
André Deutsch, £12.95

As an autobiography this is stranger than fiction. At the age of six, we are told, Elias Canetti, winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Literature, tried to kill his cousin with an axe. After the murder attempt—though it was only in jest—Canetti was pitched by way of punishment into a cauldron of boiling water. His skin came off with his clothes. At this point, one wonders if any of this tomfool grotesquerie might have influenced Canetti's bizarre and wonderful novel *Auto da Fé*, in which an eminent sinologist—a cross between Nabokov's Pnin and Chatwin's Utz—sets fire to himself in his own library.

The Tongue Set Free becomes stranger by the page. At night, for instance, it was the habit of Canetti père to frighten the little Elias by creeping into his bedroom wearing a giant wolf mask. Soon after, the poor boy starts holding imaginary conversations with the wallpaper.

This first instalment of Canetti's



autobiography tells how he was born in Bulgaria to a family of Sephardic Jews: as such, his first language was apparently medieval Spanish. In Canetti's birth-place on the lower Danube, Turks mixed with Greeks and Albanians, Armenians with gypsies and Russians. His wet-nurse was Rumanian. As a consequence, seven or eight languages were spoken in his home town of Ruschuk. Grandfather Canetti boasted mastery of 19. So, barely out of his cradle, little Elias was a polyglot. *The Tongue Set Free* is a mad but wildly entertaining book—and not in the least academic.

Soho Square

Edited by Isabel Fonseca
Bloomsbury, £9.95

One of the most idiosyncratic of this year's publications must be *Soho Square*. It is the first edition of an annual anthology of new writing and aims to "revive the bumper bedside book". A glorious hodge-podge of odds and ends, it metaphorically resembles some great

18th-century lumber-room, piled high with diverse and diverting bric-à-brac: memoirs, travel-writing, polemic, pictures and poetry. Best of all, it seeks to mingle established writers with the lesser-known, and to encourage readers towards a healthy anarchic approach in choice of reading material—laudable aims.

There is a wonderfully urbane piece on the business of travelling by Joseph Brodsky and a mad Borghesian fable by the Irish journalist Alexander Cockburn about a lexicographer who spent 14 years compiling something called *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary*. There is a wry piece by Philip Roth on the problems his writings have given the Jewish community in the United States, and there are 13 new short stories whose authors include Patricia Highsmith and Fay Weldon. One of the most entertaining articles is by the journalist Christopher Hitchens on the infamous area of Hong Kong known as the Walled City, a crowded haven for dope-pushers and prostitutes. "Oh, you don't want to go there," respectable Hong Kong

Jan Morris
has produced
what is likely
to be the
definitive book
on this ungodly
place . . . It is
a marvellous
piece of writing

Illustration by Mark Entwistle
from Hong Kong by Jan Morris

residents would warn him, "You'll get knifed and buggered."

Hong Kong

By Jan Morris
Viking, £14.95

Whether or not the above statement is true, Hong Kong will soon be much in the news. In 1997 the British return this trading city—the last great European colony—to Chinese sovereignty. From that date the city will be known as Xianggang. It is opportune that Jan Morris, one of our most talented contemporary travel writers, has produced what is likely to be the definitive book on this ungodly place.

It is a marvellous piece of writing. Jan Morris is particularly good on the non-Communist Chiniserie of Hong Kong, the tawdry consumer items which are the product of what she calls the city's "brazen embodiment of free enterprise". Among them one could expect to find electronic ashtrays and sonic rat-repellers.

Morris both loves and hates Hong Kong. On the one hand, there is the marvellous energy of Chinese life, "its fructifying untidiness, its boisterous lack of privacy, its comforting pandemonium" and, on the other, its criminal venality, the money-gorged avarice.

Edward Lear in the Levant

Compiled & edited by Susan Hyman
John Murray, £15.95
Published on November 17

Edward Lear, that great, bumbling hulk of a jester—a pair of pince-nez on a grizzly bear—gave Queen Victoria drawing lessons when Hong Kong was nearing its commercial peak as a British colony. Lear was an indefatigable traveller: he published accounts of Italy, Albania and Illyria, Calabria and Corsica; he visited and sketched Egypt, the Holy Land, Greece and India. It is good, then, to see that the beautifully-produced *Edward Lear in the Levant* will further enhance Lear's underrated reputation as landscape painter and travel writer: after all, we all know about his limericks, but as an illustrative draughtsman Lear was just as brilliant. His Levantine draw-

ings—many of them reproduced here for the first time—of Albania, Greece and Turkey are a delight. The delicate products of a dawn or dusk sketching, often wildly dramatic, they are surely the work of a major Victorian artist.

The paintings are accompanied by letters and journals, mostly hitherto unpublished and all of them bear the unmistakable stamp of Lear's dotty whimsicality: "I am neither skinned nor robbed," he writes to his sister from Rome in 1847, "but quite well". And, from Athens: "Don't you *long* to have a letter from me full of Turks & crescents & minarets?"

An Album of Curious Houses

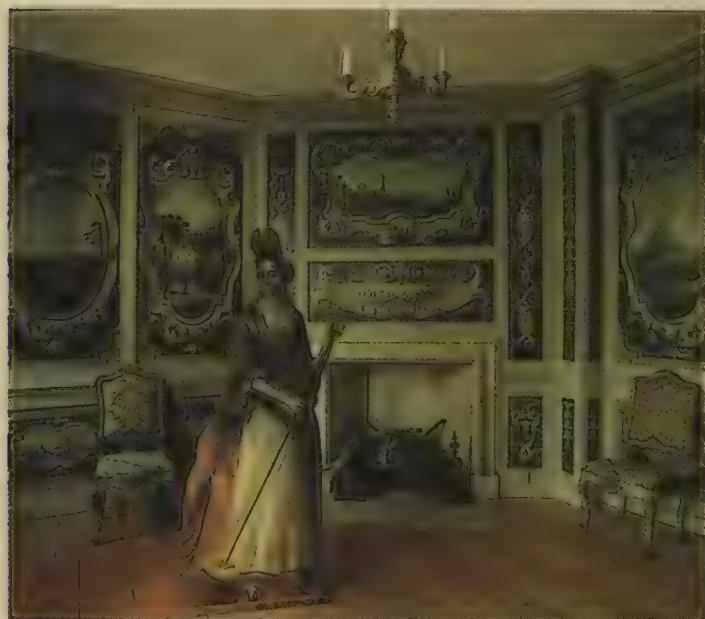
By Lucinda Lambton
Chatto & Windus, £16.95
Published on November 10

Much in the tradition of Edward Lear's surrealism is Lucinda Lambton's delightful new book. The beautifully described and photographed houses are so unexpected

and extraordinary that one can't help wondering if the whole notion is not, in the end, an elaborate exercise in make-believe.

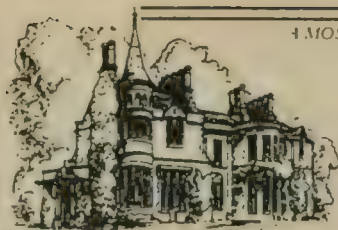
There is an underwater smoking-room in Surrey and a 1908 Yorkshire house covered almost entirely in ceramic tiles. There are triangular houses too, and we have a stately home on the Isle of Bute with a "vaulted, Gothic swimming-pool, through which you glide, as if swimming up the aisle of a parish church". The Hall of Four Maids of Honour Row, Richmond Green (four houses built between 1724 and '26) is captured too, "a grand rococo room on a tiny scale". Perhaps most endearing is an 18th-century *cottage ornée* in Devon. Built by two young ladies to celebrate their return from a 10-year grand tour of Europe, it is modelled on the 6th-century Byzantine basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna.

Lucinda Lambton, author of such unusual books as *Temples of Convenience* and *Beastly Buildings* is to be congratulated on her tireless pursuit of the eccentric, so bringing a little levity to our lives ■



Lucinda Lambton is to be congratulated on her tireless pursuit of the eccentric

Above: the Hall of Four Maids of Honour Row, Richmond Green



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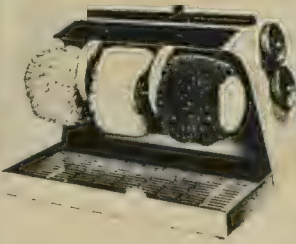
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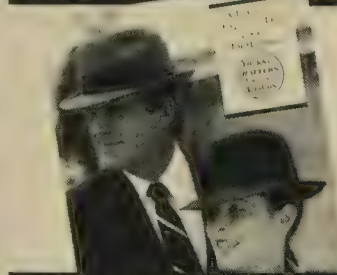
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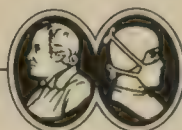
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ARCADIA

Shopping for the best at Brompton Cross. By Rosanna Greenstreet

The Brompton Cross, an area which has flourished since the opening of Conran's renovated Michelin Building, is one of the few places in London where you can buy all your Christmas presents in one afternoon. The choice on the Fulham Road, Brompton Road, Draycott Avenue and Walton Street equals that of any of the very best department stores. Almost everything is available. From sushi scissors to inflatable sharks, hip flasks to hot house plants, jewellery to Japanese jugs.

Over the last decade the area has been gradually transformed as specialist shops move in. But it took the opening of Conran's store and Bibendum restaurant to focus shoppers' attention on the area's appeal. Take **English Eccentrics**, broadly speaking a clothes shop but one that specialises in jewellery to complement their designs. This Christmas they boast exclusive hat boxes, silk-wrapped soap, striking hat, lapel and tie pins that, set in silver, started as typewriter keys.

Next door **Ogetti** is a shrine to "cult" objects and classic functional design. From Richard Sapper's kettle that whistles like an American freight train (£74.15) to a leather-bound tape measure (£52.90) there is something for everyone. D. R. Harris's Pick-me-up, endorsed by Her Majesty and reputedly a good hangover cure, is ideal for the family Bacchus, whose gifts will be largely found at **Buckingham's Wine Shop** opposite the Michelin Building.

If you gain access to **The Watch Gallery**, (it seems obligatory to hover outside until you catch an assistant's eye) it has varied timepieces—ring watches (£25), watches with interchangeable faces, those attached to miniature brace-

lets, and some that sell for an incredible £31,000. **J. K. Hill** specialises in handmade pottery; Japanese designer Tajar's orange crab and upright fish vases are particularly unusual. **The Sleeping Company** has two premises in the Fulham Road; one specialising in sleepwear—robes and satin pyjamas covered in hearts and piped in pink—and the other in bed linen and accessories like pillows and hospital corners.

*The choice
on the
Fulham Road,
Brompton Road,
Draycott
Avenue and
Walton Street
equals that
of any of
the very best
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stores*

Fulham 72, in Fulham Road, sells Paisley throws, tapestries, silk brocade curtains with heavy cord ties, needlepoint seat covers and quilts.

In Walton Street **Mansfield** resurrects the pens, silver and luggage of the flapper era. This little shop contains such delights as an oval sharkskin ladies purse complete with nine-carat gold clock (£750), a silver Dunhill aquarium lighter (£325), and an original '20s gold rolex for £1,000. Their distinguished collection of elderly suitcases belongs to an era before

conveyor belts were created. New briefcases are available, but only those made from the finest leather to traditional designs.

Walton Street is the place to pick out pictures. **The Sara Davenport Gallery** specialises in dogs, **Oliver Swann** has marine and coastal paintings, **Malcolm Innes** sells Scottish sporting and natural history subjects, and **Walker Bagshawe** offers turn-of-the-century figurative studies. **John Campbell's** shop takes care of your reframing needs.

At **Maria Andipa's Gallery** pick out an icon from her impressive collection. Starting at £75 her pieces, predominantly from Russia, date from the 1400s to the 19th-century and can cost thousands of pounds. Alternatively, a hanging oil lamp from £50 or an Ethiopian papyrus, said to relieve the sick, would make a memorable present. Opposite, the **Walton Street Stationery Shop** is the Mecca of scribes. Writing paraphernalia competes for shelf space with an outstanding selection of greeting cards. Particularly covetable are coloured glass ink pens for £33. Beyond the shoe shop **Footloose** and John Boyd's hat shop lies the showcase for Swedish designer **Moussie** whose designs are worn by Princess Diana. Children's woolies start at £45, and adult sweaters from £99 are set off by antique lace collars priced £25.

There are numerous jewellery shops on the Cross, from Fulham Road's **Butler and Wilson** for fabulous fakes, to **Manguette** in Draycott Avenue, who use semi-precious stones and hard woods, in designs originating from India and Africa. **Merola** in Walton Street specialises in decorative jewellery, art and artefacts from 1900 to 1960,

and has an impressive collection of evening bags, lizard and crocodile, from between £200 and £400; for the more *avant garde*, '40s perspex creations are from £75 to £120.

For the monogramme mad a visit to **The Monogrammed Linen Shop** is a must. They'll personalise anything from napkins to night-dresses. To stitch a child's name on the back of a dressing gown would cost about £5. Further up Walton Street the gift emporium **Saville Edells** grandly claims to house *objets extraordinaires*. Fish through the twee cushions and china gewgaws and there are some presentable ideas. One is a two-foot-high dumb waiter, which, with the help of a black and white photograph and £275 can be painted with the lucky recipient's likeness.

If time is not on your side, visit the Michelin Building. *Nunc est Bibendum*, so while fortifying yourself in the Oyster Bar, study the **Conran Shop** leaflet which offers 100 ideas for Christmas. The selection is fun: a bright painted papier mâché "winged beast" (£95), mahogany paint box £135, cigarette holder (£13.50), kaleidoscope (£45), red leather music case (£28.50), traditional perfume bottle (£14.95), candles in the shape of the Empire State Building (£4.50), or—guaranteed to cause a stir on Christmas morning—a bird's nest basket (£9.50). This is the only shop in the area with a good choice of children's presents: for the traditionalist it offers a Mr Punch glove puppet (£6.50), Dutch dolls (£36.50), stuffed toy Eeyores (£13.95), or a wooden bagatelle game (£41). If the child in mind has more sophisticated tastes, **Motor-tune** in the Brompton Road have miniature Porsches for £8.26. Grown-up sizes start at £56,000 ■

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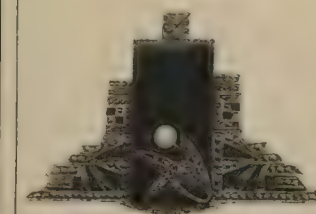
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HAPPY HOGMANAY

*Have the English taken over hogmanay,
turning what used to be New Year's
Eve into a week-long Saturnalia the Romans
themselves might envy?*

by John McEwen

Once a religious feast, Christmas is now a consumer binge that engulfs most of the winter including hogmanay, Ne'erday, and whatever else it can get its hands on. So have we Scots—after forming a bridgehead at King's Cross (where it is hogmanay all year round)—finally subjected the natives to Scottish law? Or have the flighty Sassenachs stolen from us yet again, adopting our last rustic custom and turning it into a service industry? It is difficult not to suspect the latter.

The writing was on the bottle several years ago, when the Border hinterland was invaded by a stupendous drinker from the Greater London area called Ron. Ron was a journeyman butler who had been summoned to the Borders for the hogmanay holiday to officiate during a royal visit to one of the region's coldest country houses. Like all the finest cork-sniffers Ron did not look as if he had ever thought of touching a drop, which was indeed the truth. When he drank, drops were beside the point. But, when he was rigged out as impeccably as an ocean-going steward, his weakness for a "quick one" was betrayed only by a slightly feverish tendency to tremble, easily enough put down to the chill indoor conditions.

On one occasion Ron was caught downing a glass between courses but he explained this as "having a Wellington, sir", as if he had been entrusted with the secret of some old custom of butlering, now dying for want of a quango; so no alarm bells rang as the great hogmanay dinner approached. But they rang on the great night itself all right, and for a week afterwards—that being the length of time it took Border police and Border people to recover Ron's still-living body after its disappearance on the afternoon of December 31.

Not surprisingly—and this was why it took so long to find him—Ron was discovered exactly

where one might have expected: in the local, on the spot where he had been ko'd by the last rum punch he could remember. As all visitors to Scotland know, little happens north of the Border, in or out of plain clothes, for about a week after the old year has been buried; so Ron's long absence should not suggest corruption in low places or any hint of a decline in moral standards. It just so happened that no one moved a certain trestle-table covered with a generous table-cloth until Mrs Armstrong had need of it for the first New Year meeting of the Women's Rural Institute. Contact with daylight seems to have brought Ron's torpid metabolism back on stream remarkably quickly. The royal party had long since disappeared and, redundant once more, he soon followed them into southron extinction.

Ron is surely the forerunner of the English takeover of hogmanay: a daring urban guerrilla in Maquis, or in his case Mackie, country. Like all true pioneers—Christopher Columbus, Eddie Shah etc—he had no idea what he was doing. It was only those who came after who revealed the full extent of the damage he had made possible. Ron himself, as befits the true original, was impeccable—as scrupulously brushed, combed and handkerchiefed, as stiffly correct in deportment, whether serving coffee, propping a wall or lying under a table. But the sons of Ron, metaphorically speaking, who bear their credit cards as proudly as he bore his service ribbons, dance on the table of old hogmanay as inelegantly as he once elegantly hibernated beneath it.

The brilliantined hair, the white shirt and Windsor-knotted tie that used to mark out the Olympians of old hogmanay as they began to warm up for the annual event from 5.30pm on; the heroic deeds of the night that followed, such as Malcolm's pinning of the local garage's "Open" sign to the front door of the prim and



proper Rhona ("OdoRhona") Mackenzie—these rituals and extravagances have now been replaced by Costa congas and doleful renderings of "Here we go", in Kirriemuir as much as in Trafalgar Square. But perhaps these are the same comparisons that were being drawn by the old locals when Ron appeared and disappeared so suddenly all those hogmanays ago?

Now it seems appropriate to dust down a copy of Palmer and Lloyd's *Year of Festivals* and turn to page 93: "Saturn was the god of agriculture. In Roman mythology he was overthrown by Jupiter. The festival to commemorate this legendary happening began about the middle of December and continued until the Kalends of January ushered in the New Year. December 25 was called *Dies Natalis Invicti Solis*—the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

"At the same time the barbarians of the north of Europe were keeping a similar winter festival known as the Yule. Great logs were set to blaze in honour of their gods Odin and Thor, and people clustered round the bonfires, drinking from horns filled with mead and listening to their poets and minstrels singing ancient songs and legends. Mistletoe was ceremoniously cut, and sacrifices were made to mark the turn of the year. In Persia fires were lit to Mithras, the god who

Riotous
merry-making
took place and
masters feasted with
their slaves

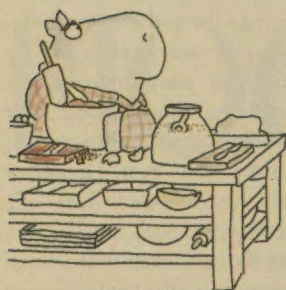
represented the light of day and the bright heavens. At one time Mithraism, which was spread by soldiers who travelled about Europe, was a serious threat to Christianity.

"The Saturnalia was both a gigantic fair and a festival of the home. Riotous merry-making took place in the cities and villages of the Roman Empire"—including Trafalgar Square. "Friends visited each other, taking with them good luck presents: fruits, cakes, wax candles"—Ron, etc. "Masters feasted with their slaves, who were given the freedom to do and say what they liked. A Mock King, representing Saturn, was appointed to take charge of the revels and his word was law so long as his reign lasted..." Doesn't Jimmy Savile spend hogmanay at Chequers? "... "The more impudent his words the louder he was cheered."

So there it is. Hogmanay is nothing to do with the Scots, the English, Kirriemuir, King's Cross, Trafalgar Square, Jimmy Savile, Ron or anyone else. It's simply all of us making piggies of ourselves while endless ages run ■

Pudding & Punch

Recipes from Sandra Boynton's latest creation *Christmastime*



ABOUT PLUM PUDDING

Except for the fact that there are no plums in it, "Plum Pudding" is a very aptly-named dish. British in origin, its enjoyment has spread to many other countries, too. Often silver coins and trinkets are baked right into the pudding, a custom reputed to have been started and popularized by dentists.

Plum Pudding is a very challenging, time-consuming and expensive dessert to make, but the results are well worth someone else's time and money.

PLUM PUDDING

Withhold from winter songbirds;

10 ounces (280 grammes) beef suet

Shred the suet very fine, and add to it:

8 ounces (225 grammes) raisins

1 pound (450 grammes) currants

grated peel of 1 lemon

4 ounces (110 grammes) candied orange

4 ounces (110 grammes) candied lemon

In a separate bowl, mix together:

8 ounces (225 grammes) plain flour

7½ ounces (210 grammes) dark brown sugar

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

2 teaspoons ground cloves

1 teaspoon grated nutmeg

½ teaspoon ground ginger

Add to the fruit mixture. In a separate bowl, beat:

3 eggs

8 fluid ounces (200 millilitres) milk

3½ tablespoons brandy

Add this to the fruit mixture. Put in a cool place, and let stand 12 hours.

To steam the pudding: Transfer the mixture to a buttered 2 quart pudding basin. Cover the basin with buttered grease-proof paper, then foil. Tie tightly with string. Place it in a large pot, and pour in boiling water to reach halfway up the basin. Bring water to a gentle boil, and cover the pot tightly. Steam for 4 hours. Add boiling water throughout steaming, to maintain water level. When cool, replace foil and

paper top with fresh paper. Store in a cool, dry place.

To serve the pudding: Steam the pudding a second time, for 2 hours. Turn it out on to a serving plate, pour over it 2 tablespoons heated brandy, and ignite.



COOKIES FROM GERMANY

There are a great number of cooks who love to try out traditional Christmas foods from other countries and a great number of guests who really don't understand foreign food.

Pfeffernüsse are traditional German Christmas cookies. They are white on the outside and dark brown on the inside, rich and spicy and slightly dry. Their name means "pepper nuts"; and "pepper nuts" doesn't mean anything.

PFEFFERNÜSSE

Preheat oven to 190°C 375°F Mark 5. In a heavy saucepan, bring slowly to a boil:

12 ounces (340 grammes) honey

8 ounces (225 grammes) corn syrup or golden syrup

Let simmer 5 minutes, then add:

1½ ounces (40 grammes) unsalted butter

Remove from the heat and let cool. In a separate bowl, sift together, then sift again:

1 pound (450 grammes) plain flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon ground cloves

2 teaspoons ground allspice

½ teaspoon ground white pepper

In yet another bowl, blend together:

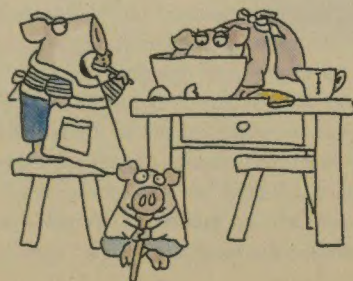
1 egg

3 drops oil of anise

4½ ounces (125 grammes) dark brown sugar

2 tablespoons grated lemon peel

Add the cooled syrup to the egg mixture.



Add the flour mixture, heaped tablespoons at a time, stirring constantly.

Shape the dough into 1-inch balls, and press lightly on to greased, unrimmed baking sheets.

Bake for 12 to 15 minutes. Cool on a rack for 5 minutes, then roll in icing sugar.

WHAT'S A-WASSAILING?

"Wassail" is a salutation meaning "To your health!" It is also the name of the hot spiced ale that is used for the drinking of healths at Christmastime. Often there is an ornate silver Wassail Bowl, which is filled with the wassail drink and carried from house to neighbour's house, as the bearers "go a-wassailing".

At each house, a toast is drunk to the health of every member of the household. After the fifth house, toasts are often drunk to the health of the furniture as well.

Some etymologists believe that the word "wassail" comes from the Middle English "was" (BE) and "hail" (HALE, i.e. in good health). But anyone who has ever been wassailed knows that "wassail" is simply an inebriated contraction of "What's in this ale?" This is what's in it:



WASSAIL PUNCH

Core, halve, and roast:

120 medium apples

Beat with a wire whisk:

240 eggs

When you have recovered, pour the eggs into a largish pewter kettle. Add:

100 gallons (457 litres) ale

Add the apples, and bring to a boil over medium flame. Add:

24 pounds (10 kilos 800 grammes) molasses

2 pounds (900 grammes) raw sugar

2,640 blanched almonds

4 ounces (110 grammes) grated nutmeg

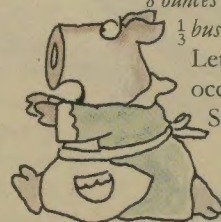
1½ pounds (675 grammes) ground cinnamon

8 ounces (225 grammes) ground ginger

½ bushel (12 litres) whole cloves

Let simmer 2 hours, stirring occasionally.

Serve hot. And often.



Christmastime is published by Methuen, £6.99.



"My thesis on Origami..." he enthused. But he folded when we unwrapped the Graham's Port.



The Oriental's favourite pastime all but flattened dinner.

It had been a superlative evening; topics of conversation unfolding in pace with the courses.

The Boeuf en Croute had proved a revelation, while the Kiwi Fruit Glace was particularly enlightening.

As belts were discreetly loosened, thoughts drifted to more fulfilling matters:

The first glass of Graham's. That rich glowing colour. The fruity bouquet. That depth of flavour.

A train of thought that was shared by everyone. Well, almost everyone.

"Origami's a pet subject of mine"! Brows creased. Napkins were crushed.

One whiff of the Graham's and his pet subject was confetti. Civilised conversation re-asserted itself.

Thank the Lord for the Douro Valley Vineyards. God bless those little Portuguese Grapes.

And the Devil take Origami.

GRAHAM'S PORT. THE LAST WORD.

GRAHAM'S
Late Bottled Vintage
1981
PORT

OPORTO



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